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**“CON AMORE.”**

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# “CON AMORE;”

OR,

## CRITICAL CHAPTERS.

BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY,

AUTHOR OF “THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS,” ETC.

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LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.  
1868.

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LONDON:

SAVILL, EDWARDS AND CO., PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,  
COVENT GARDEN.



## P R E F A C E.



THE Critical Chapters which follow, and which were to me a labour of love, are, for the most part, reproduced with certain alterations from reviews and magazines. Some originally appeared in the *Westminster Review*, some in the *London Quarterly*, the remainder in monthly publications. Some I have only altered so far as to substitute the *Ego* for the conventional “we”—a substitution which I hope may before long become universal in reviews and magazines, and even newspapers, when every writer is allowed to come face to face with the public, and to be himself responsible for what he says, and when, to borrow the German phrase, the word is the man. Others of these essays are more materially altered; one

or two have indeed but the kernel of their original form left to them. The translations I introduce in one or two of the essays are my own in every instance, except that of one poem, of which the version I give was supplied by a lady.

J. McC.





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## Voltaire's Romances, and their Moral.

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**T**N Goldsmith's story, Dr. Johnson is represented as a candidate for a place in the chariot of Fame, which he claims by virtue of the ponderous Dictionary he bears under his arm. He is informed, much to his surprise, that Fame cares nothing for his *magnum opus*, and intends to assign him a place among those she honours only for the sake of the little romance he thought too trifling even to put forward. Whether right or wrong as regarded Johnson, the fable will apply to many eminent literary men who, labouring hard to overtake Fame in one way, were surprised to find her coming to meet them in a direction entirely unexpected. On what does the renown of Voltaire mainly rest? The vast Philosophical Dictionary has made but little mark upon the intellect of Europe. The "Henriade" is looked upon very much as people think of a college prize poem. The nations which possess a

Shakspeare, a Schiller, an Alfieri, can scarcely warm into enthusiasm even over "Zaire ;" and it is difficult to read the "Orphan of China" without a sensation of the ludicrous at the *petit maître* love-making of the great Tartar conqueror. Even Voltaire the clear and vivid historian is quite overshadowed by Voltaire the satirist and the wit. Of that latter being, the best and most characteristic memorials possessed by posterity are the fantastic, humorous *novellettes* and satirical fables known as his romances. A man's true nature, says Goethe, is best divined by observing what he ridicules. In these romances we can study Voltaire's real nature ; for in them we have set before us all he thought ridiculous in society around him and in the general systems of the world. In them he is not playing the philosopher or toiling to be an epic poet. In them we can discern him free of the personal weaknesses with which feeble health, much flattery, self-created vexations, and the injudicious humourings of friends, crusted over his better nature. A man who thoroughly and fairly studied these little stories would probably lay them down with a better knowledge of the real nature and genius of Voltaire than was acquired by Frederick of Prussia, by Madame du Chatelet, or by Madame Denis.

It was unfortunate for the development of Voltaire's special gifts that he should have been proclaimed, because of a few bold utterances, a prophet by one party of listeners, and a blasphemer by another. It is un-

fortunate for the true appreciation of his genius, that so many people still persist in regarding him as an audacious infidel philosopher, or a great progressive sage. The truth is, that nature, character, and circumstances quite disqualified Voltaire from becoming what can with any propriety be termed a philosopher of any kind. He was unable to take a large and general view of most subjects; to balance the good and the evil; to discern how much of either was accidental to a system, and how much was inherent and ineradicable; to trace out patiently the connexion of effect with cause. Voltaire was what Condorcet correctly termed an impatient spirit. The absurdities or the defects of anything actually coming under his own notice, Voltaire could expose to ridicule and contempt as no other man could. If a system had a weak point, Voltaire could in the fewest possible words place its weakness in the most ludicrous light. But he was not a man whose opinion of the general character of the system should have been accepted unconditionally by any one. Few men of his day were less qualified to judge of Christianity as a system of religion; but no man could so effectively expose the errors and inconsistencies into which the professing Christians plunged when they set up their own self-conceit and prejudice as the interpreter and standard of Christian doctrines. It is amazing to observe the dread and horror with which many people even still shrink from the perusal of Voltaire's

writings. Supposing him to have been an anti-Christian, a more harmless opponent Christianity has seldom encountered. That man must in our days be simple indeed whose Christian faith could be affected in the slightest by the keenest of Voltaire's arguments. Even where Voltaire had a clear view of the truth, he frequently failed to take a tenable position in its favour. He founded a variety of arguments against Popery upon the contrast between the personal immorality of many Popes and their supposed spiritual infallibility. But he seemed to forget that Roman Catholics do not claim personal infallibility for a Pope acting merely as an individual; and that Roman Catholic doctrines, true or false, are no more affected by the blunders or the crimes of a single Pope than the truths of any part of the Old Testament by the human errors of David. Voltaire is generally as weak in his theological arguments as in his famous explanation of the vestiges of shelly formations found in the Alps, by the hypothesis of pilgrims having let fall their cockleshells while crossing the Great St. Bernard. It is astonishing to find many people even still fall into the unspeakable absurdity of regarding Voltaire as an atheist, in ignorance of the fact that some of the only serious and dreary passages in his satires are those which he devotes to the superfluous labour of demonstrating the irrationality of Atheism. Indeed, Voltaire all but detested atheists, and firmly believed he had himself

given to the world some splendid confutations of their errors. Unfortunately, the individual who set up for an atheist must have been a very dull personage indeed if he could not answer some of the arguments which Voltaire pompously parades for his confusion in the dialogue between the pious Englishman, Freind, and the infidel companion of the youth who bears the peculiarly British prenomen of Ienni. The explanation is, that Voltaire really felt little interest in abstract truths of any kind. A genuine human grievance, a downright human folly, quickened him into intense animation ; but he had not a nature which sympathized much with the mere maintenance of principle. His genius was altogether of the partisan order. He did not much trouble himself by a laborious investigation of both sides of a question ; but where his instinct led him right, he could hit with a keen force which philosophy alone could never master. All his interests were thoroughly human, thoroughly wrapped up in the movements of ordinary life. Many of his philosophic sayings and dogmas, which were received in his own day with reverent admiration or with shouts of denunciation, are universally recognised now as the mere commonplaces of truth, or as paradoxes whose extravagance needs no refutation. But the satirical wit which he brought to the exposure of some actual grievance or genuine folly remains immortal—keen and fresh as ever, although the grievance and the folly have long passed away. One popular idea of Voltaire

is that of a mere scoffer at sacred things, a ribald reviler of the best human sentiments. Another common notion of him is that of a cold sceptic, who subjected everything to the test of a narrow reasoning process ; a man who cared nothing personally either for good or evil ; who was all brain and no heart. If his romances fairly reflect the real nature of Voltaire, they exhibit the character of a very warm-hearted, sensitive, undiscriminating man, who sickened over human suffering and human persecution, and who employed, with an almost reckless prodigality, against the enemies he hated most, the instinctive weapon of wit which served him best.

As mere stories, these romances have little value. No reader can be warmed into any interest by their personages or their incidents. No one can for a moment forget that Voltaire is speaking to him, and not the Princess of Babylon, or the luckless Candide. No child could care to read them. The very simplest student of fairy-tale literature could not be deceived into believing that they breathed the genuine atmosphere of the East. There is no rich colouring in them ; no heightening of beauty, as Mary Wortley Montagu said, by the idea of profusion ; very little simple pathos ; scarcely a gleam of hearty, exhilarating good humour. Some one said no pure mind could understand them. Taken in its literal meaning, the criticism was entirely unjust ; but it was very correct indeed, if it merely meant to signify that no one,

ignorant of the evil ways of the world in Voltaire's age, could appreciate or even comprehend them. They are simply the satirical hooks on which Voltaire gibbeted, for exposure to the world and posterity, all the evils of human origin which he saw crushing down humanity in France. His satire is often too comprehensive and sweeping ; often, indeed, entirely unjust in its personal application. Whatever Voltaire did of his own impulse, he did earnestly, and sometimes extravagantly. He did not go to war for an idea ; he embodied every opponent, and hated it like a personal enemy. The same headlong generosity and headlong animosity which characterized him in his dealings with individuals entered into his satirical review of events and systems. Right or wrong, Voltaire was thoroughly practical, and when he touched the shield of an opponent, hit fiercely and straightforward with the point of his weapon. What shortens the average lives of Frenchmen ; what makes men poor, and keeps them so ; what embitters domestic life ; what renders children blessings instead of curses ; what stifles free thought ; what turns philosophy to a sham—these were the questions with which his sympathies tormented Voltaire. He thought that the state of society around him gave answers to many of them, which he determined to interpret into intelligible language. These satirical romances are valuable because they contain Voltaire's explanations of the condition of France in his day. War, religion, hypocrisy, religious intoler-

ance, court domination and court intrigue, superficial or quack philosophy, idlers, soldiers, and priests—these Voltaire looked upon as the national evils of France; therefore his romances are simply satires directed unchangingly and perseveringly against all these enemies. But for the never-failing wit which makes the dullest theme sparkle with the most varying lights, they would be positively monotonous, so uniform is their pervading purpose.

War of any kind seemed to Voltaire a pure, unmitigated evil. He saw nothing in it but scenes such as he has described in “Candide”—slaughter and licentiousness, blazing roofs and mangled bodies. Religion he almost invariably identified with its professors, as Mr. Bertram, in Scott’s novel, could only think of the king’s revenues as embodied in the persons of the gaugers. Voltaire looked around society, and saw that bigotry and lazy priests were common there. He heard doctrines of the most savage intolerance promulgated as if they were gospel truths. He knew that men and women—harmless, industrious, and moral people—had been turned out of house and home because they differed from the ruling church on the question of Transubstantiation, or the unqualified supremacy of the Pope. He had spoken with those who could tell him of the scenes which followed the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He saw that to persecute the religious opinions of others was very often accepted as an atonement for personal immorality.

and irreligion. After reading one of Voltaire's descriptions of a bigot and a priest, it is painful to have to believe that in many instances the strength of the satire lay in the unexaggerated correctness of its application. A man is not to be charged with deliberate impiety, because he sometimes was extravagant in his scorn of religious teachings which their own exponents maintained must necessarily conduct to the intolerance they practised. Voltaire was a nervous man, with a keen dread of physical pain. He quivered all over at the idea of bodily torture. He saw that throughout the course of history one point of resemblance had connected almost all the great religious sects of the world. Each, in its day of power, had, at some time or other, endeavoured to enforce its views by the infliction of bodily torture. Voltaire was not sufficiently impartial to recognise the fact, that it was but the possession of unlimited power by arrogant human creatures which led to the employment of such modes of persecution. A man of feeling rather than of reasoning power, it was enough for him to see that in France there was neither happiness nor freedom ; that something calling itself religion presided ostensibly over society, and represented to the world the Divine Providence as a kind of exaggeration of the character of Louis XIV. It was sufficient for Voltaire to observe this ; and, gifted with the most powerful weapon in the world, he used it like a partisan, and not like a philosopher.

Voltaire was particularly angry with some of those who invented consolations for men's misery. He flamed up especially against those who endeavoured to satisfy unquiet minds with the shallow quibbles which passed for optimism, and whose whole secret consisted in calling a disagreeable thing by a fine name. The Lisbon earthquake, which took place in 1755, had, no one needs to be told, an especial effect on the mind of Voltaire. It seemed to him that such a calamity utterly confounded the self-satisfied dogmas of those who sought to philosophize a beneficent scheme out of the events of this world alone, without reference to any supplemental and higher state of being. Well-meaning persons furnish terrible weapons to a man like Voltaire, when they endeavour to vindicate God's providence by ingenious arguments about the fitness of things, and the physical and human good directly arising out of everything. The Lisbon earthquake taken by itself—and Voltaire would not take it otherwise—appeared to him a mere destruction of human life, an uncompensated and unconditioned evil. It was idle to tell Voltaire that the earthquake which destroyed so many human beings must be regarded as a beneficent process, because a certain condition of physical nature or of society demanded a purgation. An intellect very much below that of Voltaire could not fail to perceive the absurdity of such an argument, or, indeed, of any argument which takes upon itself to interpret and explain the

secrets of Providence. Few will forget that, in the town of Frankfort, a bright-eyed precocious child began to argue himself into infidelity because of that same Lisbon earthquake. A genius of a more exalted and poetic kind effaced the morbid impressions drawn out of this calamity more readily from the mind of Goethe than from that of Voltaire. The reasoning of Voltaire upon this and kindred subjects is not indeed a whit better than that of the moral philosophers who argued against him. Taken in Voltaire's point of view, a single twinge of tooth-ache ought as distinctly to interfere with the belief in a beneficent Providence as the destruction of countless lives in Lisbon. If we accept Voltaire's reasoning, that physical suffering caused to a human being is nothing but evil, and that a beneficent power cannot cause or tolerate evil, the momentary pang of a single individual is quite as efficacious for the argument as the ruin of a city. But Voltaire's reasonings upon the Lisbon earthquake explain, in great measure, the character of the man, and excuse much that seems unmeasured in his satires. He looked only at the outside or shell of everything, and weighed all questions by their relation to man's physical happiness. Optimism jarred most harshly against Voltaire's special ways of thinking. The romance of "Candide" contains in the person of Dr. Pangloss one of the strongest, coarsest caricatures satiric literature can produce. It is impossible not to be amused

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at the whimsically pertinacious manner in which Pangloss clings to his philosophy, despite of all external shocks ; and at the naïve credulity and naïve scepticism of Candide, equally absurd when he believes and when he doubts. But the satire is extravagantly overdone, just because the satirist felt his subject warmly, and determined to draw his caricature in lines so black and heavy, that no one could fail to recognise the portrait. The story, too, is spun out beyond all reasonable endurance. Candide's travels want variety. Nobody could read the work merely as a story : and a satirical tale, whatever its merits, is so far a failure if it cannot be admired for its mere narrative. "Candide" cannot be read as people read "Gulliver's Travels," or "Gil Blas." It entirely lacks warm descriptive power, and shows little skill in the delineation of character. No man had a keener eye for human whims, weaknesses, and follies than the satirist of Cirey: but while he could set these off in the most ludicrous light, Voltaire could not draw a full individual character. He did not even trouble himself to develop whatever capability of that kind he may have possessed. His interest was not in the narrative he told, or the people he described, but in the follies and vices he satirized ; and so long as he made his meaning plain and vivid, he was little concerned for the artistic perfection of the narrative. He concentrated his gaze upon the peculiar object he wished to satirize, until at length its proportions became magnified to his vision.

Pangloss is a personage of preposterous absurdity ; so extravagantly drawn that the traits sometimes fail to have any genuine satirical force of application. It is curious to observe how inartistic and ineffective Voltaire is when compared with Swift upon a similar subject. Gulliver is about the size of a Brobdignagian's little finger. We can all see the relative proportions, and can appreciate the humour of the situations in which such a pygmy is placed when encompassed by such giants. We can at once conceive what Gulliver looks like on Glumdalclitch's knee. But of Voltaire's Micromegas, who is so large that he takes a whale upon his thumbnail, and requires a microscope to discern the shape of the Leviathan, we can form no conception whatever. The extravagance of the disproportion renders it quite impossible to realize, and so deprives it of the power even to excite our wonder. What Micromegas is to the Brobdignagians, Pangloss is to Don Quixote.

Is it not a mistake to talk of the knowledge of human nature displayed in "Zadig" and "Candide"? Where is there in these stories a single personage like any ordinary man or woman? Where is there any capacity evinced for moulding and blending together the variety of traits which make up even the most insipid of human characters? To discern that some men were honest and some hypocritical; that most women of the age were over fond of gaiety and of pleasure; that priests were sometimes sensual and

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sometimes deceitful ; that magistrates were occasionally corrupt ; that courtiers were not uncommonly parasites ; and that philosophers not unusually got into depths where they could neither stand nor float—to discern all this surely required no very profound penetration of human nature. Yet the groundwork of all Voltaire's satires sinks no deeper than this. Even on some of his favourite themes Voltaire was occasionally quite incorrect in his general views of the human character. Hypocrisy was one of the vices he most delighted to satirize. Yet he never appeared to appreciate the fact, that scarcely any human being ever believed himself to be a hypocrite, and admitted himself to a full, bare knowledge of his own falsehood. Voltaire's idea of a hypocrite is the old stage villain who deceives others, but not himself. Voltaire delighted to expose bigotry, but his picture of a bigot was almost invariably that of a mere religious swindler—a man cruel in the repression of antagonistic belief, but himself without either faith or morals. Indeed, Voltaire generally delineated human nature as a very much more simple and less complicated kind of thing than any really comprehensive observer would have drawn it. One of the commonest of errors is to ascribe to a man a profound insight into human nature because he is quick in ferreting out certain special foibles or vices. Ordinary individuals in gossiping conversation commonly display an abundance of this kind of penetration into the moral constitution of their neighbours. The majority of Voltaire's men and

women are mere lay figures on which to hang his scraps of satire. The Princess of Babylon is not distinguishable from Cunegonde or Astarte, except by the difference of the adventures. Even the adventures themselves are frequently flat and colourless in effect. Compare the travels of Candide with the voyages of Sinbad ! Compare the sketches of gay life with those of Gil Blas ! Compare the portraits of eccentric or humorous characters with those of Molière ! Compare the extravaganza incidents with those of Swift ! Compare the Oriental correspondence of Amabed with the "Persian Letters" of Montesquieu. Nowhere does Voltaire sink for a moment his own identity. Less egotistical than Rousseau so far as direct allusion to himself was concerned, he was far more so in the perpetual introduction of his own peculiar notions upon every subject. Other of the great charms of every species of fiction are also wanting to these stories. Scarcely a gleam of beauty, even of the sensuous kind, shines upon them. Beauty of style is not the thing wanting, for in their own way the style of these stories is incomparable. But no sensation is diffused by any one of them to show that their author thrilled with any emotion for beauty in nature or in art. Even a beautiful woman is only described by a dry catalogue of charms like that pronounced by Olivia in "Twelfth Night":—"Item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth." There is not so much of a recognition of the beautiful

throughout the whole of these romances as is expressed in the few lines of the Roman satirist about the valley and springs of Egeria. There is little of human affection in them : little even of genuine human passion. For aught these satiric fables teach us, men and women might be only good from a sense of propriety or honour, bad because they happened to have no such feeling. Parting and death—those most pregnant themes of the story-teller of every age—have scarcely any real share in the interest of these romances. In the story of the Huron, L'Ingenu, and his beautiful and ill-fated mistress, Voltaire most nearly approaches to a sympathy with the pangs of parted lovers ; and yet it may be very well questioned whether any human eyes ever moistened over the separations and sufferings of the pair he describes. It is only by observing the deficiency of Voltaire in so many of the great leading characters of a story-teller and a satirist that it is possible to appreciate fully the surpassing power of the special attributes by which he became so successful in each capacity.

The purpose which animates almost every one of these tales, and the wit which gives force and brightness to every one of them, are the characteristics for which they merit to be immortal. No cold sceptic, working with unimpassioned heart and bitter tongue, is discernible to the reader who gives them an impartial study, but a sensitive and impulsive man, whose earnest nature lent fire to his matchless wit. That

weapon of wit which in these satires Voltaire wielded honestly for the sake of his fellow-men, was surely the very keenest of its kind ever employed in such a cause. Some of these romances preserve its finest achievements. Voltaire's wit is not like Molière's, for it never exuberates ; or Pascal's, for it never acknowledges earnestness ; or Le Sage's, for it is never sprightly and careless ; or Goldsmith's, for it is never child-like ; or Swift's, for it is never savage ; or Sydney Smith's, for it never plays upon words ; or Douglas Jerrold's, for it never outwardly exhibits bitterness. Time and change have indeed somewhat cooled much of the interest which the world felt in Voltaire's satire, as well as in that of Pascal. We no longer feel very keenly the evils against which those great masters of sarcasm lifted up their voices. Let us be glad to think that Father Fa Tutto is gone along with the intellectual supremacy of the Jesuits. We feel as little immediate and personal satisfaction in the humiliation of either, as in the exposure of Margaret of Navarre's detested Cordeliers. But Voltaire's wit is of a kind which owes nothing of its preservation to its subject. On the contrary, there could be no topic so ephemeral and trifling which, encased in the amber of that incomparable satire, would not remain preserved for ever. It seems to have come to its author by instinct, and to have come from him without effort. None of the great humorists and satirists of the world's literature seem to have been gifted with a faculty of

sarcastic expression at once so powerful and so easy. It sparkles forth so readily that it appears to have been spontaneous and out of its author's control. It is so full of meaning and so perfect that long labour might have been given to its preparation, and no further attempt at emendation or improvement could do anything but spoil it. Half a dozen light, apparently careless words, and behold a whole generation's folly so completely turned inside out, that the dullest must see its drollery, and the gravest must laugh at it. One is reminded of the expert German executioners who boasted that they could sweep their sword blade through the neck of the culprit so lightly and so dexterously that he died without feeling the thrill of his death-blow. What an admirable essay on the wisdom of the decree which sentenced Byng to die, is wrapped up in the immortal words carelessly let fall in "*Candide*" :—"Dans ce pays-ci il est bon de tuer de temps en temps un amiral pour encourager les autres!" Probably since Voltaire wrote the lines no words have been more often quoted in his own country and in ours. People who never read one line of Voltaire, people who never bestowed a thought upon the source or the origin of the quotation, are every day repeating and applying its concluding phrase. Even the never-dying "*Nous avons changé tout cela,*" and "*que diable allait il faire dans cette galère,*" of Molière scarcely show themselves so often in print. Every page of these romances supplies a sentence just

as pregnant with humour, just as whimsically effective in its application. Take, for instance, at random a page in "L'Homme aux Quarante Ecus"—that which describes the debate between the theologians concerning the soul of Marcus Antoninus. When all the chief reasons have been urged which sustained those who believed no worse fate than purgatory had befallen the great emperor, the argument is brought to a climax by adding, "Moreover there is some respect due to a crowned head—'il ne faut pas le damner légèrement.'" In how many different shapes has this sentiment been imitated and reproduced, by how many different writers, and who ever made it half so true, telling, and humorous? The Oriental Amabed, describing in his letters one of the "vice-dieux," as he terms the Popes, who has just expired in Rome, pictures him as "an old, turbulent soldier, who loved war like a madman; always on horseback, distributing blessings and sabre-cuts, damning souls and killing bodies," and adds, with a comic naïveté as untranslatable as irresistible, "Quel diable de vice-dieu on avait là!" In "The Travels of Scarmentado" we are told of a certain famous bishop whose boast was that he had decapitated, drowned, or burned ten millions of infidels in America. "I cannot help thinking," gravely adds Scarmentado, "that the bishop exaggerated; but even if we reduce his sacrifices to five millions, *cela serait encore admirable.*" Such illustrations might be multiplied through page after page. They need no searching

and no selection. They lie scattered by the prodigal hand of the great wit everywhere over his lighter works. It may be owned that many keen witticisms are couched in phrases which must not now be translated at all. Not all the adventures or the observations of Candide or Cunegonde or Charmes-les-yeux will bear to be reproduced for any English readers of this day. Voltaire fell too freely into one of the errors of his age, and the seriousness of the error must not be treated lightly. But that age was not as ours is, and it is only fair to the memory of Voltaire to say that he wrote but as others wrote and spoke—that his writings did not contrast with the literature of all the world besides, as the novels of Balzac, and Paul de Kock, and Dumas Fils, and so many of the *chansons* of Beranger more recently did. Many of the passages which no one now can read aloud were once recited by the lips of Voltaire himself to groups of accomplished and irreproachable women, who only laughed at their plain speaking and thought no harm. Possibly we are better than our great grandfathers and grandmothers in this respect at least; but we must not anathematize Voltaire in especial. Voltaire's, too, let it be added, was only plain-speaking. He was not more plain-spoken than Fielding or Swift; and he never approached the corrupting, heartless, unmanly indecency of Congreve or Wycherley. Even Addison, the pure and good, with “a Sabbath shining on his face,” will not bear to be read aloud now, unexpurgated and word

for word, to a female audience. We must not condemn our authors by an *ex post facto* law; above all we must not single any special one out, and while allowing all the rest to go scot free, apply the retrospective clause to him alone.

The story of “L'Ingenu” is that which bears the nearest resemblance to a romance, according to our English meaning. There is more of feeling in it than in any of its companions. Not thoroughly original itself, it has been the parent of many a romantic tale. A young Canadian savage, sprung from European forefathers, comes by chance to live with his surviving relatives in France, where his simple nature is opposed, startled, and thwarted at every turn by the meanness, hypocrisy, and falsehood of civilized ways. The young Huron is, of course, the famous “noble savage” of poets and romancists: the ideal being, endowed with all the best qualities of man in his most perfect condition, and free from any of the weaknesses and errors of civilization. Generous, truthful, temperate, loving, and brave, this Huron, it must be owned, in nowise resembles any of the dirty, lying, drinking, treacherous, and remorseless savages with whom some of Voltaire's countrymen made unhappy acquaintance at a day not much later. The Huron, who for his noble simplicity is styled “L'Ingenu,” becomes a Christian; and, studying the Bible, is every day bewildered to observe how little the practices of Christians consort with their doctrines. He falls in love with the beautiful Made-

moiselle de Saint Yves, and is loved in return. Chance throws him in the way of gaining an important victory for his countrymen over an invading band of Englishmen (all our heroes of the same day win wonderful triumphs over the French): he goes to court to seek some reward for his services, but falling in with some expelled Huguenots on the way, espouses their cause with an ardour and an openness which bring on him a *lettre-de-cachet*. Cast into prison, he becomes the companion of an old condemned Jansenist, Gordon. From him the Huron learns to appreciate and love literature, and acquires a knowledge of many arts and sciences. The friendship and companionship of this imprisoned pair evidently suggested to Alexander Dumas some of the most striking passages in his “*Château d’If*.” The learning and the piety of Gordon teach the Huron to be a genuine Christian; but, on the other hand, the simple, unsophisticated views and thoughts of the redeemed savage win the Jansenist away from the narrow bonds of his own peculiar sect, and invite him to the broader and more genial paths of Christianity. Those who only associate the name of Voltaire with impiety and ribaldry, would fail to recognise their ideal in the clear, strengthening, and manly tone of thought which pervades many of these passages. But misfortunes crowd upon the poor Huron. His mistress comes in despair to seek him, and learning of his imprisonment, implores a powerful minister for his

release. The old story of Lord Angelo or Colonel Kirke is repeated, but with a different catastrophe. A price is set upon the lover's liberation. Saint Yves struggles and resists long ; but at last, betrayed by a treacherous friend, prompted by a base confessor, she sacrifices herself to redeem her lover, and finally dies of grief and shame. A professional romancist might unquestionably have made a very charming and pathetic story out of these materials. Even as the tale stands written, although its satire is its most prominent part, it has many occasional glimpses of feeling and of tenderness. Gleams of a pathos not commonly belonging to such a style shine here and there through it. But Voltaire did not care to produce an affecting romance ; the loves and the unmerited sufferings of L'Ingenu and his mistress were only invented to enable the author more vividly and effectively to satirize religious hypocrisy and priestly intolerance. Thus it is a satire such as only Voltaire could have produced. It has no playing upon words, and no extravagant caricatures. Quiet deep thrusts are so lightly given, that they seem at first mere punctures. Pascal might have written the dialogue in which Father Tout-à-tout endeavours to reconcile the conscience of the struggling St. Yves to the act forced upon her. With a quiet satirical power, wholly indescribable, we are told that the confessor was rewarded by his patron with " boxes of chocolate, sugar candy, citron, comfits, and the *Meditations* of the Rev. Father Croiset and

the Flower of Saints bound in morocco.” Some indications, too, are in this story of a sympathy with more delicate shades of human emotion than those evoked by racks and gaol torments. “Ah!” exclaims the unhappy Saint Yves, when almost overpowered by the proffered generosity of her betrayer, “que je vous aimerais si vous ne vouliez pas être tout aimé!” L’Ingenu, the reader is told, never after her death alluded to her without a deep sigh—“et cependant sa consolation était d’en parler.”

Perhaps, however, Voltaire’s happiest style is to be seen in his shorter papers. His capacity for producing effective and precious trifles was something wonderful,—not mere curiosities, but condensed morceaux of genuine satire, whose meaning grows and deepens as they are studied. What, for instance, can surpass the concise humour of Scarmentado’s Travels? Or “The Blind Judges of Colours,” with its whimsical conclusion, in which, after the recital of all the quarrels and battles which took place among the blind disputants, each of whom claimed to be an infallible judge of colours, we are gravely told that a deaf man, who had read the tale, admitted the folly of the sightless men in presuming to decide questions of colour, but stoutly maintained that deaf men were the only qualified musical critics? Or Bababec and the Fakirs? A Mussulman, who is the supposed narrator of the tale, and a good Brahmin, Omri, visit the Fakir groups by the banks of the Ganges, at Benares. Some of these

holy men are dancing on their heads ; some inserting nails in their flesh ; some staring fixedly at the tips of their noses, in the belief that they thus will see the celestial light. One, named Bababec, is revered for special sanctity because he went naked, wore a huge chain round his neck, and sat upon pointed nails which pierced his flesh. Omri consults this saintly sage as to his own chances of reaching Brahma's abode after death. The Fakir asks him how he regulates his life. "I endeavour," says Omri, "to be a good citizen, a good husband, a good father, and a good friend. I lend money without interest to those who have need; I give to the poor, and I maintain peace among my neighbours." "I am sorry for you," interrupts the pious Fakir, "your case is hopeless ; you never put nails *dans votre cul*."

Such specimens, however, are only like the brick which the dullard in the old story brought away for the purpose of giving his friends an idea of the beauty of the temple. Admirably as the French language is adapted for the expression of dry, satirical humour, Voltaire developed its capability in this way to a degree equalled by no other man. So much sarcastic force was, probably, never compressed into so few and such simple words as in many of these little fictions. The reader is positively amazed at the dexterity with which subjects are placed in the most ludicrous light possible, and the easy manner in which the legerdemain is performed. Sometimes Voltaire's ideas become extravagant, but his style never does. Sydney Smith

frequently lacks simplicity, but Voltaire is always simple, and never strains. What an admirable pamphleteer Voltaire would have made had he but been an Englishman ! What inextinguishable ridicule he would have scattered over a Ministry or an Opposition ! How irresistibly people would have been forced to think anything he laughed at deserving of laughter ! How he would have written up some measure of emancipation, and made a reluctant Government afraid to refuse it ! That Voltaire appreciated English freedom of speech no one needs to be told. Had he but understood the genius and the worth of our best literature as well, it would have been better for his critical, and, perhaps, for his dramatic fame. Voltaire of course made fun of English ways now and then. My Lord *Qu'importe*, or *What-then*, who said nothing but "How d'ye do" at quarter-hour intervals, is the prototype of many a caricature drawn by succeeding hands. But in the very chapter which contained this good-humoured hit at our proverbial insular taciturnity, he calls the English the most perfect government in the world, and adds with a truth which prevails at this day as much as ever, "There are, indeed, always two parties in England who fight with the pen and with intrigue, but they invariably unite when there is need to take up arms to defend their country and their liberty ; they may hate each other, but they love the State ; they are like jealous lovers, whose rivalry is to see which shall serve their mistress best."

A noble weapon was that Voltaire owned, for one who used it rightly—who understood, as Sydney Smith said, how to value and how to despise it. It would be idle to deny that Voltaire sometimes used it unfairly. Fantastic, hot-tempered, sensitive, spiteful by nature, how could such a man have such a stiletto always unsheathed, and not sometimes give a jealous stab, and sometimes thrust too deeply, and sometimes wound those who were not worth piercing at all? He often imported petty personal spleens into his satires, and used his giant's strength upon some poor ephemeral pygmy, some Freron, or some Boyer. But so did Horace, and Pope, and Swift, and so has Thackeray done even in our own milder days. Voltaire has got a worse name for meanness of this kind than almost any other man of kindred genius, and yet seems, after all, to deserve it less than most of the great satirists of the world.

Indeed, posterity has, upon the whole, dealt very harshly with Voltaire's errors, and made scant allowance of the praise which his purposes and efforts so often deserved. Few of the leading satirists of literature ever so consistently and, all things considered, so boldly turned their points against that which deserved to be wounded. Religious intolerance and religious hypocrisy, the crying sins of France in Voltaire's day, were the steady objects of his satire. Where, in these stories at least, does he attempt to satirize religion? Where does he make a gibe of genuine human affec-

tion? Where does he sneer at an honest effort to serve humanity? Where does he wilfully turn his face from the truth? Calmly surveying those marvellous satirical novels, the unprejudiced reader will search in vain for the blasphemy and impiety with which so many well-meaning people have charged the fictions of Voltaire. Where is the blasphemy in "*Zadig?*" It is brimful of satire against fickle wives and false friends, intriguing courtiers, weak kings, intolerant ecclesiastics, and many other personages tolerably well known in France at that day. They might naturally complain of blasphemy who believed themselves included in the description of the learned Magi who doomed *Zadig* to be impaled for his heretical doctrines touching the existence of griffins. "No one was impaled after all, whereupon many wise doctors murmured and presaged the speedy downfall of Babylon," was a sentence which probably many in Paris thought exceedingly offensive and impious. Possibly yet greater offence was conveyed to many minds by *Zadig*'s famous candle argument. *Zadig* having been sold to slavery, fell into the hands of a very humane and rational merchant, named Setoc. "He discovered in his master a natural tendency to good and much clear sense. He was sorry to observe, however, that Setoc adored the sun, moon, and stars, according to the ancient usage of Araby. . . . One evening *Zadig* lit a great number of flambeaux in the tent, and when his patron appeared, flung himself

on his knees before the illumined wax, exclaiming, ‘Eternal and brilliant lights, be always propitious to me !’ ‘What are you doing ?’ asked Setoc, in amazement. ‘I am doing as you do,’ replied Zadig. ‘I adore the lamps, and I neglect their Maker and mine.’ Setoc comprehended the profound sense of this illustration. The wisdom of his slave entered his soul ; he lavished his incense no more upon created things, but adored the Eternal Being who made them all.”

Is it impious to satirize the glory of war, the levity of French society, the practice of burying the dead in close churchyards in the midst of cities, the venal disposal of legal and military offices ? All these are the subjects on which the author pours out his gall in the “Vision of Babouc.” The travels of Scaramentado simply expose religious intolerance in France, Spain, England, Italy, Holland, China, &c. The letters of Amabed denounce fanaticism coupled with profligacy. Anything said against the manner in which the vices of Fa Tutto are exposed, must apply equally to Aristophanes and Juvenal, to Rabelais and Swift, to Marlowe and Massinger. The “History of Jenni” is a very humdrum argumentation against Atheism ; ineffectual, we fear, to convert very hardened infidels, and serving only to demonstrate the author’s good intentions and his incapacity for theological controversy. “The White Bull,” if it have any meaning whatever beyond that of any of Anthony Hamilton’s Fairy Tales, means to satirize the literal interpretations of

certain portions of the Old Testament in which very stupid theologians delighted. To accuse of blasphemy every man who refused to accept the interpretations which Voltaire in this extravagant parable appears to reject, would be to affix the charge upon some of the profoundest of our own theologians, some of the best and wisest of our thinkers. It is unquestionable that Voltaire was deficient in that quality which we call veneration. He had no respect even for what Carlyle terms the “majesty of custom.” With all his hatred of intolerance, he was himself singularly intolerant of error. He did not care to *menager* the feelings of those whose logical inaccuracy he ridiculed. Frequently and grievously he sinned against good taste, against that kindly, manly feeling which prompts a gentle mode of pointing out a fellow-man’s errors and follies. But there is nothing in these volumes, at least, which affords any real foundation for a charge of blasphemy, or wilful impiety ; and these volumes more truly and faithfully than anything else which remains of him reflect to posterity the real character and spirit, the head and heart, of Voltaire. In these we learn what Voltaire thought deserving of ridicule : and with that knowledge, on the great German’s principle, we come to know the man himself.

What is the moral of all these satires ? Voltaire gave them to the world with a moral purpose, and, indeed, marred the artistic effect of many of them by the resolute adherence with which he clung to it. Do

they teach anything but that truth, unselfishness, genuine religious feeling, freedom, and love are the good angels of humanity ; and falsehood, selfishness, hypocrisy, intolerance, and lawless passion its enemies and its curses ? Why accept Juvenal as a moral teacher, and reject Voltaire ? Why affix to the name of Voltaire a stigma no one now applies to that of Rabelais ? Voltaire mocked at certain religious teachings unquestionably ; and it is not, under ordinary circumstances, amiable or creditable to find food for satire in the religious ceremonials or professions of any man. To do so would now be inexcusable, because it would be wholly unnecessary. Where each man has full and equal freedom to preach, pray, and profess what he pleases, nothing but malignity or vulgarity can prompt any one to make a public gibe of his neighbour's ceremonials of worship, even although his neighbour's moral practices may appear somewhat inconsistent with true worship of any kind. To satirize the practices or doctrines of the Established Church of any civilized country now argues, not courage, but sheer impertinence and vulgarity. There is no need to scoff at that which no one is constrained to reverence. But things were very different when Voltaire wrote. To set the world laughing at certain religious ceremonials was a very pardonable act when those who conducted them arrogated to themselves dominion over the worldly and the eternal happiness of any one who declined to join in their mode of

worship. Where it might entail banishment, worldly ruin, or even death, to speak a free word of criticism upon the doctrines or the hierophants of the dominant church, it was not merely a very excusable, but a very necessary and praiseworthy deed to expose the folly of some of the teachings, the inconsistency and im-morality of some of the teachers.

Gessler may wear his hat any fashion he chooses, and only ill-breeding would laugh at him so long as he does not insist upon any one performing any act of homage to his humour. But when he sets his beaver upon a pole in the centre of the market-place, and orders imprisonment or exile for every subject who will not fall down and worship it, that man does a brave and a wise act who sets the world laughing at the tyrant and his preposterous arrogance. The personages who used to sing comic songs and dance the clog-dance during the performance of divine service at St. George's-in-the-East some years ago were vulgar and culpable boors. Whatever they might have thought of the service, they were not compelled to attend it, and in our days theological differences are not decided by mobs and hobnailed shoes. But if the incumbent of the church had the power to bring down penal dis-qualification, or exile, or worldly ruin upon the heads of all who declined to acknowledge his ceremonials as their worship, the first man who raised a bold laugh at the whole performance might be very justly regarded as a hero. Something, at least of this qualified

character is to be said in palliation of the irreverence of Voltaire. Much that was stigmatized as blasphemy a century ago most people regard as plain truth now. Much even of the most objectionable of Voltaire's writings may be excused by the circumstances of the time, by the feelings with which he wrote, by the distorted and hideous form in which Christianity was presented in the dogmas of so many of its professional exponents. Much, it is true, may be admitted to be wholly inexcusable, for did he not produce the "Pucelle?" But no one claims for Voltaire an immunity from some severe censure. All that is sought for him is a more general and generous recognition of the praise he merited and the motives which impelled him, a mitigation of the sentence which so many have pronounced upon him. No other man from Voltaire's birth downwards, not even excepting Rousseau, has borne such extravagance of praise followed by such a load of obloquy. He was not a profound thinker; he was not a hero; he was not a martyr for truth; he was not a blameless man. But he had at least half-glimpses of many truths not of his own time, and which the world has recognised and acknowledged since. He had probably as much of the heroic in him as a man constitutionally nervous and timid could well be expected to have. No one would ever have relished less the endurance of the martyr's sufferings in his own person, but he made odious and despicable those who had caused or con-

nived at their infliction upon others, and he did something to render future martyrdoms impossible. For his time and his temptations his personal offences were not very many or very great. If people would but cease to think of him as a philosopher either of free thought or of infidelity, and would merely regard him as a political and social satirist, they would recognise in his satirical works not only the memorials of a genius unrivalled in its own path, but the evidences of a generous nature, an enlightened perception, and an earnest desire for the happiness and the progress of human beings.





## Goethe's Poems and Ballads.

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T is not easy for ordinary English readers to place themselves in the point of view from which to judge fairly of the minor poems of Goethe.

To do anything like justice to the genius of the great German, one must accept, for the time at least, his own fundamental theory of art. This is precisely what English readers will not very readily do. In this country we are for the most part essentially practical even in our poetic criticism; and we cannot, without much difficulty, be induced to turn a favouring eye upon anything which does not show a definite object and purpose written upon it. We are apt to begin by demanding that the direct end and practical aim of anything offered to our judgment shall be explained in the first instance. For this reason, in great measure, the minor poems of Goethe have not been read in this country even in the same proportion as his greater works; although, in an

artistic point of view, it may be doubted whether in any phase of his genius it shone more brightly than in some of the ballads and lyrics. Readers in these countries cannot easily be brought to see what purpose such writings fulfilled, or why so much labour and care should have been given to the production of such bright, airy trifles. Is a man, people are inclined to ask, who devotes his life to the production of elaborately cut crystals, or curiosities in amber, fulfilling the proper end and object of his being? Serious readers can perhaps more readily overlook the graver defects of such of his larger works as war most directly with English tastes, than they can either pardon or understand the apparent waste of life and genius in scattering abroad scraps of song fashioned with the most exquisite symmetry and polish, but apparently without cause or purpose; stray fragments of crystal, clouds of diamond dust, which can by no possibility be united again to serve any useful end, or even to range in any harmonious system of ornament. There seems a want of earnestness in such work which Englishmen do not readily tolerate, and can hardly even understand. The more obtrusive errors of a Burns, possibly even the extravagant wantonesses of a Byron, find some extenuation and allowance because of the frequent earnestness and energy poets like these evinced in any cause which stirred their feelings. But the cool, placid self-devotion with which Goethe gave himself up to the art-business of his life; the calm manner in which, to the

anger even of so many among his own countrymen, he kept on studying among dry bones, polishing stones, and elaborating verses while serious, and very serious, business was stirring all around him : all this tries the toleration of ordinary English readers too far to allow them an entire critical impartiality when entering upon a consideration of the works of such a man.

In this temper, however, it is not possible to appreciate or to do the barest justice to the writings, and more especially to the minor works, of Goethe. We must be content to lay aside, for the time at least, all English idiosyncrasies upon the subject of a poet's calling, and to take calmly up with the views of the German poet himself, or we lose our labour in opening his volumes at all. These ballads and lyrics must be considered strictly and merely as works of art ; and we must be content to admit, for the while, that the sole business and the highest aim of every art is to pursue its own special development within its own limits. Indeed, in other branches of art, no one cares to question this proposition. We do not ask that the marble Apollo shall fulfil any end but that of mere beauty ; we do not demand that it shall even support an arch or hold a taper. We believe that the man has not unworthily spent his business part of life who has only engaged himself in the production of such images, though they serve no directly useful purpose. All we ask of the lapidary is to bring out every beam of the diamond, every flashing tint of the opal. The

painter who has done nothing but produce fine landscapes or beautiful faces, we admit to have, on the whole, led no useless or ignoble existence ; and no one feels disposed to arraign the public decree which sets him in a higher rank among the labourers of earth than his practical brother who combines painting with glazing. It is in this spirit we must consider the lyrics and ballads of Goethe, if we desire to consider them at all upon their own merits. Has the artist in this instance worked out his art to its highest development, so far as his strength allowed ? Has he given to his statue its fullest symmetry, roundness, and beauty ? Has he polished his gem until it irradiated from all sides its full lustre ? Has he covered his canvas, not with conventionalities to hit the passing fashion and to tempt the corrupted taste of purchasers, but with images conceived in a pure imagination, and realized upon the true principles of his art ? Try the minor poems, nay, the whole works of Goethe, by any other test than this, and his life must be pronounced a failure. Test him in this manner, and he becomes, on the whole, one of the most remarkable, self-devoted, and consummate artists the world has known.

In one respect, at least, the minor poems are, considered as a whole, the most important relic which Goethe has left behind. No other section of his works affords us so comprehensive an idea of the genius of the man. *Faust* may reveal the stretch of that genius in one direction, but it gives no perception

of its reach in another, or of its general scope. *Götz* bears no kindred resemblance to *Iphigenia*, and the *Wahlverwandtschaften* does not hint of the hand which produced the sunny brightness and refreshing cheerfulness of *Hermann und Dorothea*. But the ballads, taken as a whole, give us a picture in little of the phases which that wonderfully comprehensive intellect enclosed. They give it as, in Richter's simile, a dewdrop, a mirror, or a sea, all give back alike a perfect image of the sun, not in its greatness, but in its shape, proportions, and radiancy. Every change through which the intellect and the character of Goethe passed chronicled itself, and left an enduring record behind it, in various of his ballads and lyrics. It would be a curious, and by no means uninstructive, psychological study, to arrange and group these little clusters of poetry so as to present a metrical *tableau* or diagram of the growth, the changes, and the developments of that intellect, and of the vagaries, the passions, the gradually strengthening composure and artistic self-containment of that character. We are told by Goethe himself that he composed one of his ballads, *The Wanderer's Storm Song*, by roaring it out in one of his wilder, youthful moods—half sense, half nonsense, as he justly calls it—to meet the roaring of a storm. Poetry was in youth his anodyne, his ‘balm of hurt minds,’ his draught of nepenthe, his consolation: later in life it became his intellectual practice, his exercise, his stimulant, his cold bath, his artistic relaxa-

tion. Goethe sought healthy stimulus, as well as luxurious pleasure, in vigorous and hard-working hours of poetic composition. Everything which affected him he changed into a poem. Everything which touched his intellect or his feelings appeared to pass through a transmuting process, and come out in verse. Not that he was ever, after the *Werther* era had passed away, a poet who approached in the least to what we must call, for want of any plain English word which expresses the idea, the ‘subjective’ class. He was intensely ‘objective,’—not, indeed, by natural bias, or with the spontaneous ease of Shakespeare, but by determination and by art. When he embodied his own life, it was in a statuesque and formal manner. Yet he was not by temperament a man of strong nerves, or even great self-composure. Constitutional tendency, maternal example, and, later in life, deliberate purpose, made him, if not actually shrink from, yet as much as possible decline, participation in any emotion of a painful kind, where no benefit could arise to himself or to others. He had recourse therefore to the strength of his intellect, to counterbalance the weakness of his character and the sensitiveness of his nerves. He dramatized his emotions; made them stand out objectively from him; and thus removed them away from himself. When grief became painful, he worked it off into a poem; and, contemplating it artistically, no longer felt it as belonging to his own being. He bore up against Schiller’s loss by absorbing

his mind in the determination to complete Schiller's unfinished work. When passion grew too strong, he found a safety-valve in poetry; when aspiration drew his heart upwards—as it sometimes did—with a painful tension, he occupied it with the realities of verse, until the strain relaxed. Every emotion is crystallized into a stanza; every passing change is registered in some symbolic lines, meaningless to all appearance until you have found the key which gives the hieroglyph a solution and a purpose. To no poet more truly than to himself may that comparison be applied in which Goethe likens poetry to the painted windows of a church, which, seen from the outside, look confused and meaningless, but, gazed at from within, display beauty, harmony, and design, in every hue and outline.

Viewed, therefore, even apart from their great literary merit, Goethe's ballads and lyrics form perhaps the most curious portion of his works,—using this expression by no means slightlying. The character of the poet may be read behind them better than in any of his published *Conversations*, or in Mr. Lewes's admirable biography. When in his matured and famous years Goethe entered into conversation with one of his admirers, he must have frequently known that he was talking for the world at large, and could no more allow his real nature and feelings unaffectedly to put themselves forward, than a man who sits for a portrait which he knows is to be hung in the Royal Academy's Exhibition, can avoid a certain degree of con-

straint and pomposity of expression. Like many other men of genius who know that people are hanging on their words, Goethe liked now and then to play upon and bewilder his hearers. When at a dinner-table he obstinately refused to say a word about the progress of the French armies through Germany, and perseveringly turned the conversation to one of Boccaccio's tales, or some curious cameo specimen, one cannot help believing that general indifference to the fate of his country, or politic resolution to commit himself to nothing, had far less share in his perversely frivolous conversation than a desire to torment his wonder-wounded hearers, and drop into their opened mouths anything rather than just what they would fain have had. But his songs came from his very self. He had no living confidant, and could only express his soul through his genius fully to himself. These written words, therefore, not only remain, but they remain the only faithful record we have left,—the portrait which the rays of the sun itself have wrought, and which may be deficient from the imperfections of the material, but cannot be false ; and whose outlines suggest to the gazer how to fill up the fainter portions for himself.

This important and peculiar element in the value of the minor poems of Goethe, one must not hope to see reproduced fully in any English version. Let us take for example the most popular collection of translations we have got, that of Mr. Theodore Martin and the

late Professor Aytoun. The reader must neither lay the whole blame upon the translators, nor believe that admirers have over-rated the importance of the poems, if, after the most careful perusal of that translation, he fails to perceive in it the full meaning of which I speak. The translators could not, in deference to English tastes, include various of Goethe's ballads in their collection, some because of their over-warmth of imagination, and over-coolness of description ; not a few because they intrude a deliberately rationalistic criticism into subjects which English feelings require us to speak, and to hear spoken of, with reverence and with faith. English readers are not fond of seeing certain emotions anatomized as it were by a cool hand upon a poetic dissecting table ; or of hearing the most mysterious and solemn questions of religion passed through a process of rhythmical criticism, somewhat in the manner of a chemical analysis. Nevertheless, without these very ballads, lyrics, and epigrams, readers can have no correct idea as to the genius and ways of thought which belonged to Goethe. They are likely upon the faith of such a translation as that of which I speak to believe the poet a man much more of the English stamp than he really was: or they may have heard vague talk of his infidelity and immorality, and thus do Goethe the great injustice of ranking him as a self-exposing Rousseau or a whimsically irreverent Voltaire. Another cause, too, renders an English translation almost necessarily imperfect. There must inevitably be found,

as the authors of the volume to which I allude have observed in their Preface, a considerable amount of 'chaff' in the works of one of the most laborious and long-lived of authors. But many of the poems and epigrams which, when considered separately, may well deserve that name, and which may therefore be reasonably omitted by a translator, whose limits compel him to selection and rejection, become of no small value when viewed in the light in which I would now regard them. They fit into the portrait which the whole collection furnishes, and leave when removed a decided blank behind. They show us a mood of the poet which was not the least important in its issues to his own character. They show us Goethe as he was when the reckless fit was on him,—wayward, unbelieving, fantastic, often even frivolous. The perfection of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* obviously does not consist in the intrinsic value of the conversations, sayings, and dogmas he has collected, but in the fact that all these taken together form so complete a portrait, that the omission even of the most trifling would leave the picture imperfect in some detail. What the *Life* by Boswell would become, if condensed and pruned down to one octavo volume, even by the most intelligent and reasonable editor, a selection from the poems of Goethe is even under the hands of the most appreciative and liberal-minded translator. Therefore it cannot be expected that general readers can attain any full and precise comprehension of the intellectual character of

Goethe from a translated collection of his poems. The peculiarities of an English public will hardly allow of a complete translation ; and that thorough and accurate appreciation, which, even with the best and fullest rendering, it would be extremely difficult to attain, must with any mere selection, however carefully and intelligently made, be pronounced wholly impossible.

But if the translation of Messrs. Aytoun and Martin (and I speak of this because I fancy many English readers know Goethe's minor poems only through its pages) fail to help our public to a thorough appreciation of the genius of Goethe, it must be added that the translators appear to have had no ambition to contribute towards such an appreciation. Their object seems to have been to render certain of his ballads and lyrics popular among Englishmen. To make the songs of a great poet popular in any other language than his own, is, whatever the poet's range, not an easy task, and is one which, successfully achieved, would deserve very high commendation. But it must fatally mar the value of the enterprise if the effort be pushed so far as to seek popularity by removing the translation into a totally different sphere from that of its original. The translators could in this instance scarcely have hoped that any felicity of adaptation could render the songs of Goethe popular in that sense in which the word applies to the songs of Burns. No magic of transfiguration could work out this effect. The ballads of

Burns are intelligible in their whole meaning to every mind. No feeling or sentiment which any one of them embodies is above the appreciation of the humblest order of intellect. The most refined thought, the most philosophic scrap of moral teaching in Burns is not more difficult to appreciate than the most homespun maxim of Franklin's *Poor Richard*. The sentiment of *Auld Lang Syne* appeals neither to the culture nor to the ignorance of its hearer ; so he have but a heart, he can feel it as warmly as the most refined artist, or the most profound scholar. *A Man's a Man for a'* that thrills through the roughest coat into the homeliest bosom. *To Mary in Heaven*, *The Lament of Glencairn*, and others, require an intellectual development higher only by a very little than that of the most uncultured cottager. But that simplicity which is a main characteristic of Goethe's style by no means belongs to his turn of thought. Scarcely a single ballad in all his voluminous collection is thoroughly to be appreciated without some degree of intellectual culture. Goethe is not a poet of universal humanity. It is hopeless to attempt to render his ballads and lyrics popular, in the common meaning of the phrase, in this country. There is, beyond all doubt, a large body of English readers perfectly capable of appreciating any refinement of thought or subtlety of meaning, and who, nevertheless, being unfamiliar with German, may be said, however frequently they quote the name of Goethe, to be all but unacquainted

with his minor works at least. For that class of readers Messrs. Martin and Aytoun apparently laboured to make the ballads and lyrics of their poet acceptable. That they have not succeeded better, and rendered a valuable service to literature in general, arises in a great measure from their having altogether mistaken the limits to which translators may go in seeking after popularity, and ventured to alter and disguise their author whenever they feared that English readers were likely to find him objectionable or uncongenial.

The first question which must be asked in such a case surely is, how far it is possible to make the poems popular, while presenting them just as they are, or at least with the utmost fidelity of likeness which can be retained. Where the essential characteristic of a poem is that it is unsuited for popularity, it is scarcely a merit on the part of a translator that he has laboured at converting it into a popular shape. The question is not which shall be the most readable translation, but which shall be at the same time the most readable and the most faithful. There are, as Goethe himself somewhere observes, two ways of translating an author. One is to make him as much as possible an adopted child of the country into whose language his works are rendered,—to make Goethe, let us say, in the present instance, an English poet. The other, and far more difficult mode, is to endeavour successfully to bring the reader to the author, to lead the former to comprehend and appreciate the nature of

the latter, to master the foreign peculiarities of thought and structure,—to make him understand Goethe the German, instead of converting Goethe for the time into a popular Briton. To take a very familiar instance; Pope succeeded in producing, as a translation of the *Iliad*, a poem essentially popular. For adaptability to its readers no translation we have in English can possibly compare with it. But, when a reader has got his mind and memory thoroughly filled with it, can he be said to have mastered and appreciated Homer? Except that he has learned the story and known the personages of the epic, he is quite as far from being able to judge of the character of the poet as he was before he had read a line of the translation. Pope did not make his readers for the moment Greek, but he made his poet English. Such a translation Martin and Aytoun seem to have laboured to produce. It is bad enough that Goethe has been converted into an English poet, but this is not by any means the worst part of transformation. Now he appears a poet of the days of Chaucer and Gower; now of the Shakespearean and Spenserian age. Anon he is a Scottish minstrel of the school of the Ettrick Shepherd; a little farther, and he is a downright cockney in his gait and phrase. Even in the least objectionable renderings we are sometimes amazed to find a monotonous and empty inflation made the leading characteristic of ballads we had always believed to be eminent for their noble simplicity of style and

language. The translators appear to have scarcely even for a moment sunk their own identity in that of the poet. The hand of an Englishman or Scotchman of the present day, labouring for an English or Scotch public of the present day, is perceptible in every page. A translator is not an editor, who may alter and amend the contributions sent to him, in order that he may fulfil a definite and consistent purpose. The duty of a translator is the plain one of producing a version as like as can possibly be wrought, in spirit, structure, and words, to the original which lies before him. If a poet is designedly subtle in thought, you are not to present him as the utterer of mere commonplaces and platitudes, in order that every reader may understand him without difficulty. If he chooses to adopt a style which is simple to bareness, you are not to hang him over with flowers, and pieces of tinsel, and purple rags, to make a popular audience admire him. If it pleases him to wanton in over-sensuous and irreverent images and words, you are not to substitute spiritualized sentiment and the language of pious worship, in order that devout minds may not turn away with repugnance. When a translator believes that he cannot allow the sentiment or the words of a poem to go with the sanction of his name before English readers, his obvious part is to leave the poem untranslated. He cannot feel himself justified in conscience, when he presents to us something altogether different, the very

opposite in meaning to that which the original contained; and then appeals to the public on such evidence to lend their sanction and their approval to that which conscientiously rendered would provoke avoidance and condemnation. If it be heinously culpable to falsify the language of a foreign author in order that home readers may think evil where none existed, it is, although in a lesser degree, still culpable to falsify it in order that readers may suspect no evil where evil actually does exist. What a touching piece of pious sentiment for instance is that which we find under the name of *Holy Family* in that collection of peculiarly modern rhymes and sonnets which Aytoun and Martin offered to the public as specimens “after the manner of the antique!”

“O child of beauty rare !  
O mother chaste and fair!  
How happy seem they both, so far beyond compare,  
She in her infant blest,  
And he in conscious rest  
Nestling within the soft, warm cradle of her breast !  
What joy that sight might bear  
To him who sees them there,  
If with a pure and guilt-untroubled eye  
He looked upon the twain, like Joseph standing by !”

The translator who ventures upon such a rendering surely trusts too much to the ignorance of his readers—or at least to their benevolence, to excuse him because of his good intentions. I grant that the original lines can hardly be translated into English so as to preserve any sufficient hint of their real mean-

ing. But although this might be a very excellent reason for leaving them untranslated altogether, it affords no excuse for metamorphosing implied scepticism and plainly expressed sensuousness into a moral and devotional hymn.

The original runs thus :—

“ *Oh des süßen kindes, und oh der glücklichen Mutter !  
Wie sie sich einzig in ihm, wie es in ihr sich ergetzt !  
Welche Wonne gewährte der Blick auf dies herrliche Bild mir,  
Stünd' ich Armer nicht so heilig wie Joseph dabei !* ”

All I need say of the meaning of the last line to readers not acquainted with German is, that the one thing needful to the poet to complete his enjoyment of the beautiful vision he gazes upon, is as nearly as possible diametrically the opposite to that with which the translators' pious fraud adorns his words. Artistically, the translation is as false to the style as to the meaning of the original. For bare and simple gracefulness of language it substitutes ten lines of pompous, empty inflation.

In the *Wreaths*, a somewhat similar instance will be found. Why not give, if the poem is to be given at all, the true meaning of the line ?—

“ *Hin auf Golgotha's Gipfel ausländische Götter zu ehren.* ”

There is not much in the subject or the lines to render the poem indispensable to English readers ; but if we are to have a translation at all, it should be such as will allow us to judge of what the poet

really wrote, and leave the poet himself to bear the full responsibility of it in the minds of all to whom his verses make their way. Why the translators who ventured upon the *Bride of Corinth* should have feared to give the true meaning of this line, or to leave the poem untranslated, it is not very easy to explain. The latter course would have avoided any chance of objection.

It does not need the evidence of the *Bride of Corinth* to illustrate what the translators refer to as the pagan tendencies of the mind of Goethe. Indeed, such a poem would be very insufficient evidence of the fact, if it stood alone; and should at least be qualified and counterbalanced by the emphatically anti-pagan sentiments of the *Prometheus* fragment. But Goethe's mind was in fact a singular combination of the Greek and the German. A phase of the French seemed to pass across it for a time, but was soon shaken off. It had little either of the Roman or the Anglo-Saxon cast. From the Greek source came the clearness, the crystalline brightness, the intense polish, the sensuous beauty. From the German came the analytic Rationalism, the introverted inquiry, the anatomized emotion, the laborious culture, the immense concentration upon single points and abstraction from everything around. In almost the slightest of the ballads can be traced the mingling of these qualities. Some of them appear as airy, light, and brilliant poetic trifles as the songs of Anacreon. But they are not so. Looked into more

closely, they have not the careless enjoyment, the spontaneity of sensuousness, which produced the Greek minstrel's honey-laden hummings. They are not the joyous, irrepressible outbursts of sensuous genius abandoning itself to its own unchastened expression. They are poetic exercises, carefully elaborated products of an intellect which is conscious of its own power of varied development, and which labours in this path only for a new species of practice. Clear as Goethe's maturity was from the early Wertherian morbidness, it is almost impossible to peruse any of his poems without a feeling of melancholy. The man who wrote thus was all his life through a lonely man. His destiny he must have believed to be to cultivate his intellect upon all sides ; and this he fulfilled thoroughly, untiringly, with lonely labour. It is preposterous to convict him of pagan tendencies upon the evidence of the *Roman Elegies* and the *Bride of Corinth*. He worked at his little pagan gems because he thought it good practice. He saw that there was artistically what we may perhaps call an "opening" for a poem which should present the early introduction of Christianity in a point of view wholly different from that which any other modern writer had adopted, and accordingly he seized upon the ghastly legend which he has so fearfully and powerfully poetized in the *Bride of Corinth*. It was a labour in which Goethe took an especial delight, and for which his peculiar mind eminently fitted him, to

endeavour to realize objects in a dramatic sense ; to throw himself into another's position of sight ; to feel as others felt. In this peculiarity he was precisely opposite to Byron. Our English poet never contrived to lose sight of his own personality. He saw everything only in relation to himself. The sea was glorious while he sailed over it or swam in it : the woods, because they afforded retiring places when he chose to be lonely : the lake abroad, because it reminded him of his own dear lake at home ; and the dear lake at home, no doubt, because it reminded him of the lake abroad. Through the green and yellow spectacle-glasses of his own moods he looked at everything. Goethe, on the contrary, endeavoured continually to vary the point of sight from which he looked upon nature and life. He spoke with just contempt of the weakness of Kotzebue, who, wherever he travelled, saw nothing in the seas or mountains which surrounded him, but looked only inward upon his own moody personality in all his wanderings. Goethe threw his whole being for the time into the mediæval freebooter heart of *Götz*, into the generous carelessness of *Egmont*, into the restless, grasping intellect of *Faust*, and the pagan yearnings of the *Bride of Corinth*. A critic may therefore draw any theory he pleases as to the mental tendencies of the poet, if he only looks at one poem, or set of poems. The author of the *Bride of Corinth* is a heathen : the author of *Faust* an infidel in the first part, and a

Roman Catholic at the close. *Iphigenia* suggests a Greek, and the *West-Eastern Divan* an Oriental. But take them together, and it becomes evident that the author tried his strength in all these several directions, because he would have intellectual and varied exercise. The freakishness of Goethe's youth was not wholly shaken off in his maturer years, and he loved to exhibit his genius in fantastic and varying postures. As Rousseau's strength lay in rejection, so Goethe's was exhibited in selection and appropriation. Rousseau's genius was often rendered fruitless, and many of his greatest works powerless for any permanent result, by his eternal craving to seek back to the very essences of society, and to begin the whole scheme of the world over again. Goethe's main power lay in the fact, that he was able to take everything precisely as it stood, and, wasting no time in vain projects or regrets, incorporate it and transform it by the force of his own genius into something at least artistically valuable and real. Indeed, this was not only his strength, but his weakness as well. Delighted to find that in everything, good or bad, there was something which his own genius could take hold of and turn to account, he had none whatever of that earnest, "holy hatred," which a mind less dramatic would have felt for evil in all its phases.

I am anxious that no reader should for a moment take Goethe's minor poems on the faith of Martin and Aytoun's volume. If the competent German scholar

must at once declare that the poems it contains are none of Goethe's, so an ordinary English reader of taste must think Goethe, if these be fair specimens of his poems, a marvellously over-rated man. Every page is disfigured by vulgarisms. In almost every poem the translators endeavoured to improve upon their original; where he is simple, they would have him eloquent and ornate; where he is laconic, they prefer diffuseness; where he is purposely plain and unadorned, they insist that he shall adopt a jargon of metaphor and hyperbole worthy of the *précieuses ridicules*. It is a curious study to observe how often in the translation of that celebrated poem which Goethe appropriately terms the "Dedication," the simplicity of the poet is abandoned in favour of some inflated commonplace, some exhausted metaphor. "Fresh flowers, which hung full of drops," become

"The sweet young flowers! How fresh they were, and tender,  
Brimful of dew upon the sparkling lea!"

*Ein Nebel*—"a mist"—is "a white and filmy essence!" "All appeared to burn and to glow," says Goethe. "All was burning *like a molten ocean*," declare his more eloquent translators. "Passion" in the original, blazes up into "Passion's lava-tide" in the translation. Goethe says,—

"And as I spake, on me the lofty being  
Looked with a glance of sympathetic grace."

The translators amend this, “marry, how?  
Tropically:”—

“And as I spake, upon her radiant face  
Passed a sweet smile, *like a breath across a mirror!*”

Does a smile of sympathy remind any one but these translators of breath passing across a looking-glass? It certainly did not present any such association of ideas to Goethe; for there is no hint of anything looking like a mirror in the whole of the poem. “I could now,” says the poet a little further on, “approach her nearly, and look upon her closely.” “Then,” say the translators,—

“Then durst I pass *within her zone of brightness,*  
And gaze upon her with unquailing eye!”

In the last verse but one, the poet describes his imaginary instructress as declaring, that “the grave shall change into a cloud-bed.” The translators thus render the line, somewhat in the Bulwerian style:—

“Where gloomed the grave, a starry couch be seen!”

Only in the famous circle which assembled in the Hôtel Rambouillet could some of the expressions with which the translation of the poem is enriched find a favouring and appreciative audience.

*Poems in the Manner of the Antique* follow the *Dedication* in this translation. In the original German, these are composed in the ancient hexameter and pen-

tameter verse, which, the translators somewhat naively remark, "no doubt enhances the resemblance." It is not easy to pronounce a decided opinion upon the question, whether it is reasonable to present such poems as those which Goethe calls, *Approaching to the Antique Form*, in a popular English metre. At first sight there appears something almost ludicrously incongruous in transforming poems which bear such a name into peculiarly modern English verse. Without, however, raising that technical point against the translators, and allowing that rather amusing objection to be considered as put aside in their favour, I still think the objections must be great indeed which justify such a metamorphosis of such poems. It cannot be doubted that English readers do not warm to the hexameters and pentameters, and that our language is not of itself adapted to such a measure. It is obvious that we cannot produce hexameter verse endurable to British ears under the same laws of prosody which govern the rhythm of the classic poets. English lines, modelled under such conditions, might indeed look like hexameters in print; but when recited, the effect would be something like that of those amusing verses, arranged to ridicule the discrepancies of our pronunciation, in which "plough" is printed as a rhyme for "cough," "through" for "enough," and so on; having all the appearance of the smoothest rhyme to the eye, but producing the most ludicrous jangle when tested by the ear. The rules which govern the quan-

tities of English words are so unlike those of Latin prosody, that no possibility exists of the adoption of classic metre under the classic conditions. But that we cannot produce flowing and musical hexameter verse upon our own conditions is by no means equally certain. Many of Southey's efforts have freedom, force, and sonorous harmony ; and this difficult and foreign metre may almost be said to have become popularized among us since the appearance of Longfellow's *Evangeline*. I feel satisfied that it may be made acceptable even to the least practised ears, and that no cause can possibly render the attempt so justifiable as the translation of such poems as these very *Antiques* of Goethe. The translator has but to make a choice of disadvantages. He must encounter the risk of offering to his readers an unpopular measure, or he must present the poem in such a form as to deprive it of all the outward characteristics of its original. The very distinction of poetry from the highest form of prose, suggests of itself that a poet's rhyme involves so much of his minstrel character that any departure from it must render a translation only a compromise. What possible conception could a Frenchman form of the lyric greatness of Dryden, who had read *Alexander's Feast* rendered with no matter what verbal accuracy into French verse after the fashion of Cr  billon ? Could a German appreciate Gray's *Elegy*, or one of Burns's songs, done into the measure of *Hermann und Dorothea* ? If a translation is worth reading at all, it

is surely worth the encountering of a little additional difficulty in order to arrive at the closest possible approximation to the author's style and structure. The object is not merely to produce pieces of easy reading, in order that languid *dilettanti* may be induced to swallow down a few hundred lines of a great foreign poet, and then believe they know all about him. We are easily apt to forget what a hold the mere verse of a poet takes upon the mind ; how we identify it with him ; how its sound at once recalls him to our memory ; how we grow to love it for his sake as well as for its own melody. The metre, for example, of *Hermann und Dorothea* is so completely harmonized with and made part of the poem ; every sentence, and every glimpse of description, or touch of feeling, is so wrought to fall in and flow with the melody of the lines, that I do not believe any just idea could possibly be given to an English reader of such a poem by a translation cast in a different rhythmic mould.

I would, then, almost at all risks, keep to a poet's own rhythm. There need be no risk whatever of his meaning or spirit suffering in the process ; and any other consideration merely suggests a balance of imperfections, a choice between doubtful substitutes. If we cannot possibly have the original measure, then let us have plain prose, which will leave the translator unfettered as to the thoughts and language of the original ; and which, if it allow us no association connected with his rhythm, will save us from getting

jarring and false associations into our ears and our memory.

Difficult, however, as it is to recognise the “*Poems after the Antique Form*” in these specimens of modern versification, the translators have added other difficulties in some instances, which belong not merely to the metre. For instance, there are in the original two simple and graceful lines entitled *Exculpation*, and which literally rendered are thus:—

“Thou accusest the woman of changing from one to another :  
O do not blame her,—she seeks an unwavering man.”

These lines present no astonishing subtlety of meaning, no impenetrable obscurity arising from their brevity. Mr. Aytoun, however, apparently thought the sentiment required to be spread out, that it might become the more transparent.

“Wilt thou dare to blame the woman for her seeming sudden changes,  
Swaying east and swaying westward, as the breezes shake  
the tree ?  
Fool, thy selfish thought misguides thee : find the man that  
never ranges;  
Woman wavers but to seek him : is not then the fault in  
thee ?”

The translators are sometimes anxious to add metaphors and comparisons of their own where the poet found no place for any. In recompense, they at other times omit, for no very apparent reason, some comparison which the poet has thought fit to intro-

duce. In the poem called *The Swiss Alp*, the two opening lines may be thus almost literally rendered :—

“ Only last evening thy head was as brown as the locks of the  
loved one,  
Whose bright image seems silently bending to me from afar.”

Is there any impropriety in this reference to some absent fair creature? The translator will not allow of such a personality. He says :—

“ Yesterday thy head was brown as are the flowing locks of  
love.  
In the bright blue sky I watched thee towering giant-like  
above.”

I must own a decided preference for the original, and think the addition of the line about the mountain, and the bright blue sky, an ornament of a very commonplace and cheap character, which by no means improves the poem.

*The Wreaths* is made to contain a line of pompous funeral oration magniloquence ;

“ Dying as greatly as he greatly lived ;”

which, it is almost needless to say, has no parallel in the original. Through the whole volume it strikes the reader incessantly that the translators were convinced Goethe's style was capable of much improvement, and that they were the men qualified to supply its defects and adorn its barren places. Nothing short of a conjecture of this kind can explain the determination

which seems evident upon every page, to leave no verse of the original appear unaltered in its own simplicity.

The value of a majority of the smaller poems of Goethe consists more in the execution than in subject or sentiment. Many of them embody some simple thought of no great importance in itself, but which is crystallized into a perfect gem by the workmanship bestowed upon it. Perhaps no poet ever drew so much harmony and variety of expression from a language not naturally musical, as Goethe did from the German. He had a magician's power over words ; they would do anything and everything at his bidding. In many of his songs every image, every expression, has an echoing and corresponding tone in the words which contain it, as if they formed a piece of accompanying music. Some of the songs in the second part of *Faust* are master-pieces, marvels of this peculiar skill. Not in the mellifluous and sonorous accents of that glorious old Greek tongue, whose sounds Goethe so loved, can more exquisite and thrilling specimens of the perfect harmony of thought and of tone be found. One cannot expect translators to reproduce this beautiful feature in any other language. Messrs. Martin and Aytoun seem, indeed, to have made no attempt in such a direction. In some instances, where a peculiar metre was selected by the poet as corresponding exactly with the character of a song, they have introduced an altered measure for no perceptible reason, hexameters

and pentameters having no concern in it. The rippling, bubbling measure of *The Youth and the Mill-stream*, for instance, gives half the beauty to the poem, and is loved by all readers of Goethe.

“ *Wo willst du, klares Bächlein, hin  
So munter?  
Du eilst mit frohem leichtem Sinn  
Hinunter.  
Was suchst du so eilig in dem Thal?  
So höre doch und sprich einmal.*”

Is it an improvement to alter the measure in this fashion?

“ Pretty brooklet, gaily glancing  
In the morning sun;  
Why so joyous in thy dancing?  
Whither dost thou run?  
What is’t lures thee to the vale?  
Tell me, if thou hast a tale.”

All that need be said of the manner in which the translation is executed, is, that it displays quite as decided a departure from the language of Goethe, as the measure does from his rhythm.

*The Erl-King* is a ballad familiar to thousands who have scarcely ever heard the name of Goethe. It has been rendered into English by all manner of translators. Sir Walter Scott’s verse is at least good enough for all purposes, and might have spared us a translation beginning thus:—

“ Who rides so late through the grisly night?  
’Tis a father and child, and he grasps him tight.”

Who grasps whom tight ? Again, we have—

“ O father, dear father, and dost thou not mark,  
*Erlie* King’s daughters move by in the dark?  
‘ I see it, my child, but *it is not they* ;  
‘Tis the old willow nodding its head so gray ! ”

Surely such peculiarities are easily avoided, inartistic, and vulgar. The translators seem to believe that an additional touch of simplicity is thus given to the poems; but the simplicity which consists in the use of vulgar colloquial phrases is not precisely that which forms a principal charm in the ballads of Goethe. I have already spoken of the constant introduction of old English phrases, and of modern Scotticisms. In almost every page are found such words as “ rede,” “ feres,” “ Dan Cupid,” “ An’ if he might,” “ mickle,” “ bonny,” &c., &c. In some instances we have such Cockney expletives as “ seedy.” Throughout the whole volume the translators seem to have gone off upon a wrong notion of the meaning of rendering a foreign author popular in this country. Popularity they confound with vulgarity; simplicity they translate into imbecility. The first verse of the celebrated *Shepherd’s Lament*, (*Da droben auf jenem Berge,*) a ballad full of the most exquisite simplicity, of the most touching sense of solitude and sadness, comes thus out of the transmuting process, which, reversing the wonders of the philosopher’s stone, turns pure gold into dull lumps of clay :—

“Up yonder on the mountain,  
I dwelt for days together ;  
Looked down into the valley,  
This pleasant summer weather.”

Leaving the question of harmonious sound altogether aside, can these lines be called a translation of—

“*Da droben auf jenem Berge,  
Da steh' ich tausendmal  
An meinem Stabe gebogen,  
Und schaue hinab in das Thal?*”

Any objection, however, to this verse of the translation is thrown completely into shadow by the inanity and vulgarity of the following :—

“The meadow *it is pretty*,  
With flowers so fair to see :  
I gather them, *but no one*  
*Will take the flowers from me!*”

Would not this verse seem meant to parody the original, as the authors of *Rejected Addresses* burlesqued some of Wordsworth’s lines ? Here is Goethe’s verse :—

“*Da steht von schönen Blumen  
Die ganze Wiese so voll.  
Ich breche sie, ohne zu wissen,  
Wem ich sie geben soll.*”

The richness of the German tongue in dissyllabic rhymes unquestionably renders any effort at the production of a corresponding metre in English extremely difficult. Still I think some better attempt might have

been made than the following inharmonious jangle in *The Minstrel* :—

“The golden chain give not to me,  
For noble’s breast its glance is;  
Who meets and beats thy enemy,  
Amid the shock of lances.

\* \* \* \*

“I sing as sings the bird whose note  
The leafy bough *is heard on*:  
The song that falters from my throat  
For me *is ample guerdon*.”

*The Fisher* is, upon the whole, a much better rendering of a very difficult poem,—difficult at least in its simplicity, sweetness, and melody. Considering their affection for colloquial expressions, I think the translators must have resisted a great temptation, since they did not Anglicize

“*Da war’s um ihn geschehn*”

by

“It was all up with him !”

Goethe, like Burns or Béranger, is frequently peculiarly happy in a certain picturesqueness of phrase which at once flashes the whole image or idea he desires to convey upon the mind of his reader. In the famous *King in Thule*, we have examples of this peculiarity :—

“*Es ging ihm nichts darüber,*  
*Er leert’ ihn jeden Schmaus;*  
*Die Augen gingen ihm über,*  
*So oft er trank heraus.*”

Those who remember Ary Scheffer's painting, will perceive how well the painter appreciated the touching and simple force of these lines. How thoroughly the translator entered into their picturesque value will be seen from the following lines, which evince an elaborate care to remove everything that had colour or expression :—

“And ever set before him  
At banquet was the cup ;  
*And saddening thoughts came o'er him,*  
Whene'er he took it up.”

In similar spirit, for the words “*Die Augen thäten ihm sinken,*” in the closing verse, is substituted the line, “Heard Death unto him calling,”—an inelegant and uncouth introversion, no word of which is to be found in the original. “*Dort stand der alte Zecher*” is rendered, “Then rose the grand old Rover.” I cannot imagine why the dying king, who does not appear to have been given to wandering, is called a “rover,” except it be as Mr. Pecksniff used to address his youngest daughter as “playful warbler.”

The exquisite phrase “*schauerlicht,*” in the lines “to Belinda,” is impoverished down to “silver radiance streaming.” I cannot understand why, in the same poem, which has somewhat of a personal and biographical character, the translators should have substituted “treading the dances of this bright hall” for “*spieltisch,*” which is simply the “card-table;” and “whispering tongues and jealous glances” for “*unerträg-*

*lichen Gesichtern,*" which merely means "insupportable faces ;" insupportable, I presume, because the young poet did not like them, or thought them dull or inane, or was not in love with them as he was with Belinda, whom he would fain have had all to himself. Goethe does not insinuate that the people around him whispered, or glanced, or winked, or were guilty of any rudeness whatsoever. They were there, and he wanted them away, and that alone made them quite insupportable to him, without any effort of their own to that end.

A very pretty sentimental little ballad, which has found hundreds of imitators both in German and English, is that which Goethe calls "*Nähe des Geliebten,*" but which the translators prefer to designate "Separation." It contains, among other graceful verses, the following :—

“ *Ich sehe dich, wenn auf dem fernen Wege  
Der Staub sich hebt :  
In tiefer Nacht, wenn auf dem schmalen Stege  
Der Wandrer bebt.* ”

“ *Ich höre dich, wenn dort mit dumpfem Rauschen  
Die Welle steigt :  
Im stillen Haine geh' ich oft zu lauschen  
Wenn alles schweigt.”* ”

The picturesque phrases, the melodious sound of the verses, redeem the poem from any weakness or insipidity. Not so, however, in the translation :—

“ I see thee, when the wanton wind is busy,  
And dust clouds rise;  
In the deep night, when o'er *the bridge* so dizzy  
The wanderer *lies.* ”

"I hear thee, when the waves with hollow roaring  
 Gush forth *their fill* ;  
 Often along the heath *I go exploring*,  
 When all is still."

*Welcome and Departure*, one of the finest of Goethe's love-ballads, is one of the best specimens of translation this volume contains. But for one astonishing instance of purposeless exaggeration, I might say this little poem could scarcely be more fairly and elegantly done into English. "I saw thee," says Goethe, "and the mild delight floated from thy sweet glance to me." "We met," says Martin,

"and from thy glance *a tide*  
*Of stifling joy* flowed into me!"

"Out, hyperbolical fiend ! how vexest thou this man !"

All the same faults may be observed in the ballad translations which occur in Mr. Martin's *Faust*, much more recently published. The translator especially fails when he has to render any of Margaret's ballads.

I sit and I ponder  
 One only thought,  
 My senses wander,  
 My brain's distraught,

is a verse which would suit very well for a song to be sung by a young lady in a drawing-room, but it is a great deal too fine for poor Margaret, and, accordingly, has no verbal resemblance whatever to the lines in the original ballad with which it is meant to correspond.

*The King in Thule* is still less satisfactory, and is indeed positively worse than the translation by Professor Aytoun, of which I have just spoken, in the volume Mr. Martin helped to produce. *Trank letzte Lebensgluth*, for example, does not at all mean "A long last breath he drew," but something quite different. These, it may be thought, are not very important objections. But the examples I have given are not selected; they are taken quite at random; and they merely serve to illustrate a style which, good or bad, is quite unlike that of Goethe.

Even so familiar a poem as *The Bride of Corinth* has some careless inaccuracies. *Angekleidet sich auf's Bette legt*, does not mean, "On the couch he laid him still *undressed*," but exactly the contrary.

“Morgen bist du grau,  
Und nur braun erscheinst du wieder dort,”

is very inaccurately rendered by,—

“Soon must thou decay,  
Soon wilt thou be grey,  
*Dark although to-night thy tresses be.*”

Nevertheless, on the whole, it is an effective and forcible version, and, in the closing passages especially, glows up into something like the vividness and fire of the original. *The God and the Bayadere* is also a correct and an impressive translation, without exaggeration, although not without one or two awkward and inelegant phrases. *The Visit* is freely and gracefully

transformed into English. Throughout the volume the translators have approached success only in poems of which the sentiments or story involved in themselves so much of their character and value, that any reasonable degree of correctness and eloquence would secure the interest, at least, if not the admiration, of the reader.

The defects pointed out are, as I have said, not singular or rare. Indeed it is not exaggeration to say that almost every page would offer similar examples. Even those I have glanced at are, however, quite sufficient to mar the value of a volume so very limited in its contents. No one can lay the book down with anything but a feeling of disappointment and of surprise. It does not sustain the reputation which its authors previously enjoyed as scholars and versifiers; and it ought never to have been suffered to go to the public as an adequate, or even a tolerable, effort to present English readers with an idea of Goethe's minstrel genius.

As to the selections made by any translators who only profess to give random specimens, there must, of course, be wide differences of opinion. In this volume there seem to be at least two or three poems which might with great propriety have been omitted. Probably, however, the number which the translators have included comprehends about as many of Goethe's minor poems as can ever be made welcome to English readers. A few which they have introduced appear

intended to afford a glimpse or two of Goethe's humour, which was certainly not the brightest phase of the great poet's genius. It is cold humour at the best ; there is nothing captivating, genial, or warming in it. Freakishness was the most mirthful characteristic of Goethe's younger days, and not the hearty ebullience of genuine boyish spirits. His very freaks were most often fantastic intellectual flights : wild extravaganzas of verse-making ; absurd improvisation ; frantic metrical jumbles of nonsense and satirical sense ; keen-cutting caricatures of the ways and weaknesses of those around him. A few humorous specimens, which this volume contains, are feebly translated, and are in themselves quite unexhilarating. Humour of the true kind has never been a characteristic of German genius. Even in the flighty conceits and fantastic digressions of the warm-hearted and genial Richter, there is little mirth for the reader ; and Schiller is coldest and least winning when he attempts to make us laugh. Such a vein of humour as that of Shakespeare, or that of Molière, no German I know of can discover ; to that of Sterne or Swift alone is any approach made. That Goethe, in his maturer years, essayed such a kind of poem at all, was but a part of his intellectual system, which strove to stretch itself out upon every side, and become equal upon all ; to be mentally the *teres atque rotundus*,—"the smooth and round,"—which it was the philosophy of the Latin poet morally to strive for. They who would appreciate

Goethe in his strength must know him in his dramatic power, in his interpretation of the manifold strivings of the intellect, and in his pathos. The highest examples of these capabilities, even so far as the minor poems display them, will not be found in this volume ; and it would, indeed, scarcely have suited the purpose of the translators to include them. The finest specimens of depth, clearness, and at the same time condensation of thought, will be found in his epigrams and scattered scraps of poetic wisdom, none of which can reasonably be held to come within the compass of such an undertaking. The poems in which Goethe delights to lift his intellect beyond the atmosphere of ordinary intelligence, and to amuse himself with easy poetizing in regions which others cannot reach without difficulty, or breathe in without pain, would be as much out of place in a volume destined for popularity, as a selection from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or the letters of Reinhold. Almost as a matter of necessity, all translators are limited to a range of songs containing least of the peculiar elements by which Goethe is distinguished from other poets. Even the pieces in this little volume which most adequately represent his genius, and are best rendered, are just those which will be least widely appreciated. What chance is there of making, by any skill of translation, the *Bride of Corinth* an English favourite ? The point of view to which it compels us is one whose temporary assumption even is repugnant to many minds, and doubtless seems

to some to involve almost an outrage upon Christianity ; the subject is horrifying and ghastly ; the details suggestive of flesh-creeping associations. The translation of this poem is indeed one of the best in the volume ; but it is possible that other poems, not comparable with it as efforts of genius, and translated with far greater defects of execution, might find a dozen admirers for every one who can tolerate the spectral pagan *Bride*. Even where no objections of so decided a character stand between the great German and an English popularity, others arise which, if they involve no moral considerations, are for intellectual reasons not less difficult to surmount. Simplicity of style is a key to popularity, but not simplicity of style combined with intense subtlety of thought ; and this combination is the characteristic of all, save the most trivial, of Goethe's poems. With all his universality of genius, and his many high qualities of heart, he was, as I have already said, no poet of humanity. He is the aristocrat or the *savant* of Poetry. You must come within a certain sphere before you can know what of good there is in him ; you must have mastered a certain degree of knowledge before you can understand him. He set before himself a task, and he fulfilled that alone ; he believed that he had discovered the right scope of his influence, and he did not seek to deepen or widen it. He fills, indeed, a high place in literature, and breathes in an elevated and rarefied atmosphere of intellect ; but to those who cannot

reach towards him, he will not descend with helpful, uplifting hand. No peasant's cottage will ring with the refrain of his songs ; no popular gathering will be stirred to enthusiasm by the inspiration of his sentiments ; no untutored eye will be opened to a sense of art by his images of beauty.





## Friedrich Schiller.

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O man of her nations has done so much as Schiller to make the literature of Germany accepted and loved throughout the world. In the whole range of that literature there can be found but one name which will even bear comparison with that of Schiller. That the genius of Goethe sometimes reaches heights which his friend and rival could scarcely attain, it would be hardly possible to deny. But there are many reasons which preclude the author of *Faust* from being accepted as the universal representative of the poetic genius of his country. In England, for instance, Goethe is much more talked about than read; and even those who read him acquire very rarely a thorough knowledge of his works. The second part of *Faust* is known only to a small number of students who have made German literature a speciality; few people go through the whole of *Wilhelm Meister*; fewer still read the *Selective Affinities*. Many reasons,

which it is unimportant now to discuss, cause the works of the greatest German to be received with much caution in this country, where he has never had, and probably never will have, that popular and cordial reception which has been accorded to foreign authors of genius incomparably inferior. The works of Goethe are nearly three times as voluminous as those of Schiller; but the proportion of Schiller's productions known and appreciated is much greater. Schiller has not, indeed, influenced English literature to the same extent as Goethe; but he has far more nearly attained a thorough domestication among us. Possibly some causes, not absolutely personal to either poet, have considerably aided in producing this result. If the characteristics of Schiller's genius are not so easily transferred to our vernacular as those of Goethe, yet the former has been far more fortunate in his translators. No English version of any of Goethe's works will bear comparison with Coleridge's translation of *The Piccolomini*, and *Wallenstein's Death*; and Bulwer's renderings of Schiller's ballads are much more spirited and effective than any translations from Goethe's minor poems with which I am acquainted. But Schiller's is everywhere a more popular and a more resonant style. Even the very defect of his language, a somewhat too rhetorical tendency, is a quality which captivates the popular mind. Far beyond this is the fact, that Schiller has called into existence many distinct and statuesque figures, whose images stamp themselves not

alone upon the intellects, but upon the hearts and sympathies of readers. We feel, when we read his works, that we enter into communion with the man Schiller; that his feelings and his sympathies make him of kin with us, even where his genius lifts him most beyond our level: we know that what we read was written in the deepest earnestness of soul, and came forth from a heart and an intellect working together in harmony. It may be the triumph of the very highest poetic art which removes from us all suggestion of the poet's own existence, and gives us only the creations he sends forth unaccompanied by any hints of his own emotions or predilections. But that must, indeed, be the very rarest power of genius which can make the great body of readers warm towards any man whose sympathy is not made frankly manifest. Schiller was thoroughly in earnest in what he did, not merely as related to the work itself,—for in that regard no man ever was more earnest than Goethe,—but as regarded its relations to his own sympathies and to humanity. Utterly free from the slightest trace of egotism, no poet ever indicated more clearly than Schiller did, through the whole of his works, his own spiritual affinities. No poet ever took a higher view of the purport and the reach of his art, or laboured with a more earnest aspiration to attain the one, and thus fulfil the other. Probably he aspired to claim for that art a range and a fulfilment quite beyond the expectation of our own more practical century. We have now

settled down to much more matured and less enthusiastic views of what the poet's pen can do than those which prevailed in the brief splendour of the Weimar days, when the old dream of the omnipotence of *Kunst* was revived, and Germany for awhile reverenced, like Greece, the power of mere artistic beauty. But we must respect the earnest soul with which Schiller struggled to realize his dream, even if we cannot sometimes avoid an approach to a smile at the persevering efforts made by the poetic rulers of Weimarian society to force upon an unthinking world, only gaping for amusement, a lofty and æsthetic drama which should make the stage the most powerful and universal of refining and civilizing agencies. A much lower and more modest place has since been assigned to art of every kind. We have made over to it a reasonable share of the world's civilization and improvement ; but the dreams of Athens and of Weimar will never again influence societies or nations. Art has its place, as agriculture has, as science of every kind has ; but the days when people persuaded themselves that it was to arise like a new sun, and enlighten all humanity by its own unaided radiance, have faded utterly away.

We need not, however, abate our reverence for the earnestness with which such an intellect as Schiller's laboured to convert even a dream into reality. Before he had attained his noon of fame and of genius, the effects of too early struggle, of poverty, and of feeble health had very much damped, at least in outward ex-

pression, the fervour of his enthusiasm. He was cold and distant in manner, rarely warming up to strangers. "Yesterday," says Jean Paul Richter, "I went to see the stony Schiller, from whom as from a precipice strangers spring back." But not even in the exuberantly enthusiastic breast of Richter himself was there a heart more fully earnest, more entirely devoted to the service of humanity, than that of the poet whose manner thus chilled him. It was not in his daily talk, but in his works, that Schiller's spirit made itself known to the world. His great dramas have, indeed, marble purity, but not marble coldness. They are lighted up with the fire of passion, and quickened with the force of manly energy, whenever liberty, oppression, human virtue, devotion, suffering, aspiration, are the themes. People argue about Goethe's sympathy with humanity, its hopes, its failings, and its sorrows. People even debate the same point about our own Shakspeare. Who ever questions Schiller's feelings towards humanity, his deep sympathy with its errors and sufferings, his sublime aspirations for its amelioration? At this distance of time, more than a hundred years since his birth, we can read the true character of Schiller far more clearly through his works than Richter did through his worn face and shrinking awkwardness of demeanour. As we call to mind the lineaments of that face, well preserved to the world in marble, and remember its delicate spiritualized expression, we cannot help thinking,

that even in its features is the character of the man written plainly out. Few men in literature have left behind them a name more stainless ; few men in any sphere or time could have been more gentle, noble, truthful, and, in the best sense manly ; and few have bequeathed to posterity more eloquent testimonials of a thorough brotherhood with their race.

More than forty years ago, when Mr. Carlyle was very young, and had not yet arrived at the period of the "eternities," and the "vastnesses," and the "wind-bags," and the "void infinities," and the "dead putrescent cant," and the other discoveries of his riper years ; in that time when his genius in its fresh vigour needed no contortions to simulate energy ; in that time when he was content to be a critic and a man of letters, and had not yet set up for a great moral teacher and philosopher ; he produced, as we all know, a Life of Frederick Schiller. It is a very small book, containing a great deal ; and thus, it need hardly be added, forming a very striking contrast to the more recent Carlylean productions. This little biography will probably give more pleasure to an English reader than the most voluminous and exhaustively minute German work on the same subject. It is the work of an evident admirer, even an enthusiast, but not of a frantic idolater. Indeed, the whole book is so simple, so truthful, so unpretentiously earnest, that a man might read it through without ever suspecting it to have issued from the same noisy, darksome, Cyclopean

forge where *Past and Present* and *Frederick the Great* were hammered out. In this work all that it concerns most readers to know of Schiller's life will be found ; and the student can substitute, if he pleases, his own comments and inferences where he cannot adopt those of Mr. Carlyle.

Friedrich Schiller was born on the 10th of November, 1759. His birth-place was Marbach in Würtemberg ; he studied at Stuttgardt, in a scholastic institution now called the *Karls Schule* ; he removed thence to Mannheim, where he was employed as theatrical poet ; and thence to Leipzig, a town which saw some of the hard student life of the earnest-hearted Richter, and the wild, youthful days of Goethe's extravagance : he obtained the appointment of Professor of History at Jena through the interposition of Goethe with the Regent Duchess Amelia : he produced his greatest work there ; and he made it his abode until his too early death on the 9th of May, 1805. He was then little more than forty-five ; not having had allotted to him much more than half the number of years which his great rival spent on earth.

Schiller had to struggle hard in many ways before he attained to the quiet enjoyment of fame. There is something exceedingly touching about the early privations of many of the great German authors of that period, Goethe being one of the few prominent and happy exceptions. Richter sometimes wrote home for a little money to buy bread. When Fichte came to

visit Kant, then in the fulness of his fame, he was driven by sheer necessity to appeal to the elder philosopher for the loan of any sum, however trifling. Kant did all he could for his young admirer : he had no money either to lend or give, but he invited him to partake of his dinner. Schiller frequently used to sit up until the dawn of morning, fagging over his immortal historical works for booksellers, at a rate of remuneration so low, that a scrivener's clerk would now disdain to copy them for such pay. It is quite true that the value of money then was very different from its value in our days ; but making every allowance for this circumstance, I feel much inclined to doubt whether a man could not purchase more comfort for a guinea in London to-day, than at Leipzig or Jena when Schiller toiled and slaved there. Something even more touching, and to us more surprising, is the state of abject dependence upon the whim of a prince in which respectable citizens holding any kind of government appointment lived in the days of Schiller. Schiller was sent to a particular school which he hated, because the sovereign ordered it ; he pursued studies which he detested, because the gracious prince marked them out ; he had to sneak out of the paternal dominions like a culprit, that he might be free to pursue, unchecked, the literary career upon which the sovereign had set an interdict. It is not to be wondered at, that a boyhood thus passed under incessant restraint should explode in a wild and

passionate appeal to the uttermost extravagance of individual liberty. Schiller's early life was curbed and made unhappy by these restraints, and perhaps their effect was never wholly removed from his mind. He suffered occasional poverty, beyond doubt ; but scarcely anything approaching to the indigence of some of his contemporaries. His life was not broken up by any great misfortunes : and yet it is impossible to peruse his works without an impression that their author was not happy. One cause may be found in the feeble health which he had to bear with through the greater part of his life ; and it seems hardly possible to dispute that a powerfully operating cause may be discovered in the state of religious doubt in which his noble intellect and sensitive heart long fluctuated. It is not easy to gather from Schiller's maturer writings what his precise religious views were ; but it is sufficiently obvious that he was for a long time tortured by doubts which he could neither satisfy nor stifle. Constituted with a mind altogether differently cast from that of Goethe, he could not abandon such questions altogether, and, laying aside doubts, conjectures, and thought of any kind, quietly shut away all that related to his future destiny from any interference with his temporal work or temporal enjoyments. In a different sphere or time, Schiller would have been what all Christians must have recognised as a deeply religious man ; but the age and the place where he was cast, did not encourage fixed religious views, or tend towards firm

faith. What Richter terms the “seed-grains” of Rousseau’s fascinating delusions had been widely blown over Germany. The French Revolution began to shake men’s minds as to the stability of earthly opinions and policies. The speculations of Kant, and what Mr. Carlyle fitly names “the Kantean ghosts of creeds,” were seizing hold of all minds inclined to enter the hopeless labyrinth of metaphysics. Schiller eagerly caught at anything which held out even the shadow of promise, and for a while indulged, like the other followers of Kant, in futile efforts to fathom the depths of man’s destiny by the aid of metaphysics, to fill the sieve with water, to twine the ropes of sea-sand. But it is plain that his intellect found little satisfaction in this dreary labour: and in this fact may probably be found a main explanation of the tone of melancholy which seems to pervade most of his works. Let it be thoroughly understood that there is nothing in him of the feeble, whining affectation of the sentimental school; nothing of the Byron misanthropy and the Shelley morbidness of which a succeeding age witnessed the birth and the death. Not from Schiller came any tone of that perennial tearfulness into which after his day German poetry degenerated. Nothing can be less personal, and less morbid, than the character of Schiller’s greater works; no drop of repining bitterness stains them. But they leave upon the mind the deep impression of a high heart striving vainly after its ideal; looking for consolation and hope in hopeless

sources, and ever craving after something higher and truer. Strongly he contrasts in this respect with the spirit of our own Milton, whose clear soul only saw "with that inner eye which no calamity could darken," images of beauty, and hope, and trust, in all creation around him. Schiller is never, at least in his great works, gloomy; but a prevailing sadness clings to them. No theme he dwells upon with such congeniality, as that of high purpose and sensitive emotions, struggling in vain to animate the stagnation, to overleap the limitations, to exalt the earthliness of everyday life. For the Destiny of the ancient dramatists, he substituted the power of the world and of common routine influences and existences. In Ferdinand and Louisa, in Amalia, in Leonora, in Posa, in Max and Thekla, in Joanna of Orleans, we have the same struggle, embodied in all the many shapes which the full imagination of the poet created, of the ideal against the actual, of poetry against prose, of the soul against the world, of the children of light against the children of earth. It is impossible to rise from the perusal of Schiller's works without a feeling of sadness; let it be added, however, that it is equally impossible to rise from them without feelings refined and elevated. No poet's intellect ever worked more in unison with his conscience and his heart.

His friendship with Goethe is recorded to his eternal honour,—indeed to the equal honour of both men. There was little in Goethe which at first seemed

congenial with Schiller : and the society in which the elder poet moved almost alarmed the younger, who wrote, at first sight, a description of Weimar life which must obviously have been much exaggerated by his pure and scrupulous feelings. Schiller felt somewhat jealous too, at one time, of the happy, easy manner in which Goethe was enabled to enjoy his fame ; and wrote bitterly enough of the high salary which the latter poet received while lounging in delicious idleness through Italy, and of the contrast such a career presented to the rugged, unsatisfying days of labour through which some of his contemporaries were doomed to drudge. But when the men came to know each other, all feeling of jealousy and bitterness, pardonable enough at one time on either side, wholly vanished, and the close friendship which followed is probably unparalleled in literary history. There is, indeed, no instance known to me of a friendship so long and cordial between two such men, who, beyond question, were looked on by all Germany as rivals, and who, beyond question, equally desired and enjoyed fame. It has sometimes been compared to the friendship between Montaigne and Etienne de la Boëtie ; but Montaigne was too lazy to care for fame, and, even if he had been less indifferent, could have felt no fear of rivalry from his friend. In literary friendship it would be impossible to overrate the difference which the latter fact must make. The friendship of Goethe

and Schiller withstood all temptations to rivalry which either circumstances or malevolent contemporaries raised up before them. There can be no doubt that, in a literary point of view, Schiller gained much by his close relation with the elder poet. He imbibed from Goethe that appreciation of the real and the natural in artistic value, which was just the element most wanted to give strength to his genius. Schiller gladly bowed to experience, received, and in his turn imparted advice. Only death closed the co-operation of their friendship. When it so often happens that they who write of great literary men have quarrels to explain, and jealousies to excuse, it is gratifying to be able to say that Germany's literary Dioscuri were in brotherhood of friendship a very Castor and Pollux.

Perhaps there is no great poet in whom the process of development can be more clearly traced than in Schiller. His whole career as an author was comparatively short. It began with the publication of *The Robbers* in 1781, and ended with that of *Wilhelm Tell* in 1804. Leaving out of our consideration the shorter and inferior dramas, which will probably pass for nothing when we come to sum up his claims to rank among the great poets of the world, we have thus marked out his most defective and his most perfect effort,—the product of his crudest youth, and that of his most developed maturity. The growth of his intellect is traced in the succession of his works. Those

who are inclined to debate the merits of the real and the ideal schools, can hardly fail to observe that with Schiller the progress to maturity is, on the whole, a progress to reality. When we take into consideration the fact, that Schiller's first production was greeted with a wild burst of applause from Germany, which reverberated to the farthest corners of Europe, we cannot help admiring the innate, self-sustaining strength of that genius which worked out its own development through processes every one of which seemed but leading it farther and farther from the fields of its success. We can only gain a faint and feeble conception, from the pages of contemporary writers, of the burst of enthusiasm which greeted the publication of *The Robbers*. Very dull indeed, and forceless is any popular tribute to a new effort of genius in our own country at the present day, compared with the rapture of admiration, the frenzy of delight, into which young Germany was thrown on the birth of the new, fresh, and wild literature, whose every accent was a spasm, and every breath a blast. Where now was old authority? What were worn-out customs, and the rules of pedants, and the moralities of dullards? Behold! a Storm-king had arisen to sweep all such antiquated follies away, and to establish the millennial reign of passion, and exuberant youth, and vehement brotherhood. Goethe's day is clearly done. Who cares for light-hearted Egmonts, and marble-cold Iphigenias, in the new era of boisterous emotion, of

storm and high-pressure? There was some merit in Goethe and in Shakspeare: but *now*, we of the new school, we have changed all that!

If Schiller's own works did not attest his genius, no better proof can be given of its reality, than the fact that, according as it found free development, it quietly shook off that exuberance of mere feeling, which admirers would mistake for the very voice of genius itself. That portion of a poet's works which mere outer circumstances have called into existence, has little relation to his genius; and it is easy to see that, under circumstances somewhat different, we never should have had *The Robbers* at all. Had Schiller, for instance, enjoyed an early life like that of Goethe, we should have had from him no such extravagant outburst of long-suppressed antagonism. The play of *The Robbers* is an outbreak of pent-up emotion, and nothing more. A boy of spirit, more especially a boy of genius, believes the whole framework of society is unhinged when his own school-days are uncomfortably restrained, and is animated into a fiery champion of universal liberty if he has a narrow home or a harsh master. He swells his own individual wrongs into a national oppression; and identifies his own personal rebellions with the vindication of the whole human race. His feelings vent themselves in some mode of expression where energy anticipates the power of undeveloped genius, and which, perhaps by the sheer force of its fresh strength, amazes the routine life of the world around, and startles com-

monplace beings into a recognition of a new and stirring influence, whose power they admire all the more that they cannot comprehend its scope. This is the main explanation of *The Robbers*; and thus far Schiller differed but little from many a young author, who has astonished the world for a year or two, and then gradually disappeared away into oblivion. Our own age has seen several such beings come like shadows, and so depart. But Schiller was saved from such a fate by the force of that genius which might be guided, but could not be constrained. A man of second-class intellect would have gone on, endeavouring to *encore* the effect which his first work had produced; and have thus given to the world weaker and weaker or more and more extravagant imitations of the one spontaneous effort, until even adorers turned away at last in disappointment and contempt. But with Schiller the working off so much superfluous energy of emotion only cleared the channel through which the fresh current of imagination was to flow forth. Genius and art could never have worked in calm co-operation to a full development, where the path was obstructed by so much of mere personality and subjective feeling. The first effort of genius to free itself was hailed by the world as the consummation and crowning triumph of its labour. That which was merely a means, was received as a result. But the true poet soon recognised the error; and never showed the genuineness of his calling more distinctly, than in thus appreciating the diffe-

rence between the impression produced by mere energy, and the calm, concentrated, and directed force of natural and developed art.

Despite of all its extravagance and its repulsiveness, *The Robbers* still keeps the stage, and has even a place in literature. Werther and his sorrows are fairly buried ; but there is still a period in the life of every one when he thinks *The Robbers* a noble production ; and, very likely, confounding the strength of feeling with the power of imagination, believes it the most original of all its author's works. How many a literary monstrosity has that stormy Karl Moor to answer for ! His spirit walks abroad in all shapes. Now he is Byron's *Corsair*, and now he is *Paul Clifford* : and, again, Madame George Sand, reversing her early personal practice, clothes the rebel against society in feminine costume ; and perhaps soon he sinks somewhat lower, and haunts the romances of the penny periodicals. Wherever there is a spirit inclined to lift its head against social authority, there generally may be found an admirer of *The Robbers*. The fit, however, does not last long in most minds ; and I am inclined to believe that very little positive harm has been done in the world by this stormy drama ; and that, indeed, it scarcely merited the long and solemn discussions which were at one time carried on as to its moral tendency. None of the more subtle and dangerous instrumentality for evil which such writers as George Sand have mixed up with their literature, can

possibly be traced back to it. Karl Moor is responsible for some indignant declamations against the tyranny and the sham of some of society's laws, and for nothing more. The author's honest intention was to make it a work with a tremendous moral purpose ; a thing to scare vice for ever out of the world, by showing it its own image and its own fate. Reading it over calmly in after years, one does not know whether he ought to smile more at the extravagances of the drama itself, or at the solemn, moralizing tone in which the young author explains and defends in his preface the object of his work. But, at the same time, no one can help acknowledging the presence of great power and great promise in this boyish production. It is a purely ideal performance in its main features. Franz is a preposterous villain ; just the kind of monster a schoolboy would draw, without the slightest hint of a redeeming quality, without even a varying shade to chequer the bleak monotony of impossible wickedness. The character of Karl Moor, the outcast brother and robber chief, is the only one having the slightest pretension to delineation at all. Amalia, despite Mr. Carlyle's admiration for her, I cannot help thinking a young lady thoroughly insipid in general ; and, when the poet means to make her emotional, insufferably vehement and virago-like. Indeed, good, downright black-and-white drawing makes up the whole drama. When a man is angry, he raves and roars ; when he is softened he weeps in showers ; when he loves, he loves in a fury

and hurricane of passion. Everything is of the Fuseli character, or the youthful imitation of the Fuseli style.

Suppose Schiller had died immediately after the publication of this tragedy, and while the burst of admiration with which Germany received it was still ringing through the world, who could ever have conjectured that literature had lost a poet worthy to stand near to our own Milton? There are unquestionable evidences of greatness in *The Robbers*, but greatness how different in its character from that which the poet was destined to develope! Here, one might have thought, are the germs of a poetic Rousseau; possibly of a Byron or a De Musset. But what hint is there of the calm beauty, the refinement, the sublimity of the *Jungfrau von Orleans*; of the subdued thrillingness of *Wallenstein*: of the manly, homely truth, and simple nature, which make *Wilhelm Tell* immortal. There is very little poetry in *The Robbers*; even the famous sunset scene by the Danube contains little which suggests more than eloquence and vehement feeling. Schiller, when he published this play, was of nearly the same age as Goethe when he completed *Goetz von Berlichingen*; and what a difference between the two dramas! What quiet force, what simple nature, what unexaggerated pathos, shining here and there through all the boyishness of Goethe's first production! What boisterous passion and raving strength in that of Schiller! Yet the growth

and progress of the mind of Schiller upwards were far more regular, steady, and distinctly traceable, than in the instance of Goethe. I know of scarcely any case in literature, where the judgment of the world, founded upon a poet's first production, would more certainly have gone wrong, than if it had had to conjecture the character of Schiller's genius upon the evidence contained in *The Robbers* alone.

Nor would *Fiesco*, or *Kabale und Liebe* (Love and Plot) help the speculator very much further. There is great talent in these dramas, more especially in the former, many of whose incidents thrill with interest, and whose principal female character, Leonora, is a very great improvement upon Amalia. Indeed, in the gentle and devoted Leonora, there are traits which sometimes remind the reader of Shakspeare's women. There is much of spirited life-drawing in the character of Fiesco, whom Schiller paints as a somewhat deeper and more ambitious kind of Egmont. But, on the whole, the merit of the drama is rather romantic than poetic,—very rarely is any sentence uttered which speaks of the presence of the true poet. The literary value of *Kabale und Liebe* is surely over-estimated by Mr. Carlyle. It has grown upon *The Robbers* in lifelike reality; but it is even more morbid in tone and painful in catastrophe. It is of that class of drama which thrills and harrows, indeed, upon a first perusal, but which loses its power gradually as we come to know it thoroughly. In fact, Schiller had not found his path

at all up to the time when these plays exalted him in the mind of half Germany as a rival to Goethe. Probably, in estimating his genius and his fame, posterity will ignore them altogether ; and they will be studied merely as historic mementoes of the stages of growth through which the poet passed. *The Song of the Bell* is worth scores of them. Thekla's little ballad of a dozen lines will touch human feelings long after the explosive energy of these first dramas has left but its ashes behind.

In *Don Carlos* we find the first manifest indications of the poet's real self. Strong, indeed, is the contrast between this drama and those which preceded it. It is easy to conceive some impassioned admirer of Schiller's early vehemence laying down *Don Carlos* with disappointment, and perhaps even with something akin to contempt. So calm a piece of work,—the poet never once in a passion throughout the whole of it ! Here we first find the individuality of the author sinking away, and losing itself in his art. Here we find rhetoric giving place to poetry. Very disappointing, no doubt, to those ardent souls who lived in storm and pressure, to find their accepted leader deserting their ranks, and going over to the side of quiet art ; almost like Goethe, who had been captain quite long enough for some of the young rebels against the critical laws of the day. It is not easy to avoid feeling angry with a poet who is thus passing not only out of our ranks, but quite out of our range. It was pleasant to belong

to such a school of art as that which *The Robbers* founded; such a work had the precious advantage of being very easily imitated; and so long as the public were willing to confer the title of originality upon anything which was noisy and convulsive, it was delightfully easy to set up for an original genius. In our own day we have seen how half the incompetent young artists of the country enrolled themselves in the pre-Raphael school, because the characteristics of the style were so easily reproduced; and a man who had no chance of attracting attention in any other way was sure to draw some eyes upon him by imitating, in exaggerated proportions, the peculiarities of Millais or Hunt. Hundreds of young Germans must have felt personally grieved when *Don Carlos* was published, and must have looked upon the bond of brotherhood between Schiller and themselves as hopelessly dissolved. Even to this day many Germans hold what seems to me a very much exaggerated estimate of the merits of *The Robbers*, when compared with Schiller's later works. They will gravely discourse of its power and originality, and compare its characteristics with those of *Wallenstein*, or *Wilhelm Tell*, as if it were a drama of a different but not inferior order of merit. Indeed, nothing is more common in literature than to hear works praised as exemplifying the strength of imagination, which, in truth, only bear witness to its undeveloped weakness. The power of imagination consists in the capacity to produce images of humanity. No matter

how highly you exalt your standard, no matter how much you increase the proportions of humanity, it is still by this test that the real power and genuine capacity of imagination are to be judged. Nothing is more easy to produce than the grotesque and the extravagant. The farther you depart from the sphere of humanity, the easier it becomes to pile conceit upon conceit, bizarrerie upon bizarrerie. There may be readers, perhaps, who believe that *Sinbad the Sailor* displays a brighter imagination than *Hamlet*. There are readers who believe that Milton has displayed a higher imagination in his grotesque pictures of Sin and Death, than in his glimpse of Eve starting back from her own shadow in the fountain. The second part of *Faust* is immeasurably more wild and fantastic than the first. Does it, therefore, evidence a greater richness of imagination? A group of children, seated by the fire at night, will spin off stories which, for extravagance of conceit and disregard of reality or possibility, make the *Arabian Nights* seem tame and common-place. But that which makes the *Arabian Nights* a valuable work of art, as compared with those childish stories, is just the fact that so much of it clings about real existence, and strengthens and vivifies itself with the manners, the talk, the ways, the very costume of actual and interesting peoples and places.

Schiller, then, has left the era of unbridled force quite behind him. He has acquired a precious piece of knowledge in learning that the result in art of

ungoverned strength is only as the result of weakness. He has blown away, like a cloud of smoke, the superfluous personal emotion which blinded and baffled his genius. He appreciates to the full what he is doing and what he has done. He leaves *The Robbers* for his admirers to imitate, if they will, to all time. He never returns to it, even as Goethe never returned to his Wertherian sighs and wailings. He sees that art, like science, is a labour, not a burst. He perceives that tragic force must not rest on mere surprise ; that a succession of shocks cannot be kept up without either repelling the recipients in the end, or wholly losing their effect over them. He rises out of his own individuality into a sympathy with human nature far transcending the narrow limits he had first seemed to mark out. He sees that there are other sufferings besides those which misunderstood and trammelled youth must bear ; that the courage of patience and quiet, steadfast endurance deserves admiration at least as much as that which relieves itself in throes and upheavings. He comes to study men and women more closely as he withdraws from his eyes the veil which his own personality drew around them ; he endeavours to see objects and causes as others see them ; in short he begins to understand humanity in its general relations. Young authors commonly study mankind wholly through books, or else merely call up phantoms out of their own consciousness, viewed with introverted gaze ; and in neither

case produce anything destined to permanency. The images are so faint, that they soon fade away; so monotonous, that they cease speedily to attract any interest; or so extravagantly unreal, that the first sensation of surprise which they create soon gives place to contempt. Schiller began at last to see men in all their complex characteristics; no attribute wholly predominating, no shade wholly darkening, but every energy counteracted by some opposing force, and every shade relieved by some light.

He has made a great stride forward; but at the same time, I am far from agreeing with those who place *Don Carlos* even among the foremost of his dramas. Exquisite beauty of thought, noble feeling and gleams of high poetic light, illumine it throughout; but, as a whole, I cannot help thinking it somewhat monotonous and laboured. Its beauty is all but lifeless. It embodies, with artistic skill and feeling, the contrast between the rising tendency to Protestant free thought, in the person of Posa, and even the best specimens of the old Spanish Catholicism; but some of Schiller's admirers have surely done an injustice to the creations of his maturer genius, by classing Posa with the finest characters he has produced. Posa is a fragment of ideal character; no real human being at all, but an allegory, a moving symbol; the Protestant free thought, the Christian philanthropy put into a human, or at least a dramatic form. Some of the utterances which fall from the

lips of Posa express thoughts as noble and as true as ever visited Schiller's mind. Every reader is familiar with that eloquent enunciation of exalted wisdom and feeling in which Posa conveys his last message to Carlos, and admonishes him, when he is a man, to reverence the dreams of his youth. But a Posa drawn by Shakspeare would have given forth sentences of as much truth and elevated feeling ; and he would have had that reality, that distinctness of life, which Schiller failed, in this instance, to impart. Dramatically, the tragedy has the French defect of too much speech-making, and too little action. The character of the Queen is an exquisite conception of the womanly type ; but it, too, wants the life which Shakspeare could have given. There is a power, which is almost terrible, in the manner in which Schiller has painted the gloomy, lonely sternness and cruelty of Philip the Second. The impression of the King's interview with the aged, blind, implacable Cardinal-Inquisitor, forms a picture which never fades from the memory. The poet has, indeed, advanced a long way, when he has passed from mere spasm and effort into the mastery of such subdued, intense power, and the creation of so much calm, artistic beauty. But there still remains much to be attained. Schiller has yet to harmonize the ideal with the real.

I am not surveying Schiller's career in detail, but merely passing, as it were, from eminence to eminence. Through many of his earlier years, his mind appeared

to sway to and fro as if it had not yet clearly discovered what its work was to be. He had always a strong inclination towards historical studies and labours. He projected splendid schemes for the writing of history upon a grand scale ; history in a vast, comprehensive, and epical form, such as had never before been attempted. A love of history, and a genius for poetry, naturally combined into an inclination for the production of an epic. For some years Schiller was haunted by the idea of producing a great epic poem,—reviving the old classic form with the living breath of the present. He would compose a sacred epic on Moses,—surely a splendid theme, if any theme could now make an epic poem durable ; but never realized into anything by our poet. He would produce an epic of the modern world, in which Frederick the Great should be the central figure, the Achilles. He would devote himself to an epic, of which the noble character and brave deeds of Gustavus Adolphus should be the theme, and which should be moulded in *ottave rime*, and sung like the Homeric ballads by the Greeks, or the verses of Tasso by the Venetian boatmen. None of these projects came to any direct result, such as the poet contemplated ; but they had, nevertheless, their golden fruit. The study of the life and career of Gustavus Adolphus gave to the world the history of the Thirty Years' War. I am at present surveying Schiller as a poet ; and it scarcely belongs to my purpose to notice his miscella-

neous prose writings, or even his great historical works. As to the latter, whatever opinion closer and later investigations may compel us to hold with regard to the fidelity of their portraiture and the accuracy of their information, there can at least be no cavil at their style and structure. That Schiller did not complete his splendid fragment of *The Revolt of the Netherlands*, is one of the great losses which the world's literature has, in this department, been doomed to bear. To have succeeded even reasonably well in a long historical work, must be regarded as something like a triumph of versatility in such a poet as Schiller; but to have produced a complete history thrilling throughout with such brilliant description and such lofty thought as *The Thirty Years' War*, and such a noble piece of unfinished labour as *The Revolt of the Netherlands*, abundantly proves that, had he written no line of dramatic or lyric poetry, there was in Schiller a capacity for success in another great department of literature, high enough to have placed him among the foremost of the few really great historians of the modern world. But the fact which at present most deeply interests us in recalling Schiller's historical labours and epic plans is, that out of his cogitations and projects on these subjects arose the immortal dramas which illustrate the career and the fate of Wallenstein.

I do not consider *Wallenstein* the most perfect of Schiller's works; but it is undoubtedly that upon which his widest fame rests. It should scarcely be considered as a drama: it is a dramatically cast poem, or a

modern epic, with a dramatic structure adopted for the sake of ease and force. Its length renders it wholly unsuited to the stage; and, at the same time, the three parts into which it is divided, belong to each other quite as closely as those of Shakspeare's *Henry the Sixth*. It is full of the most spirited and nervous delineations of character; depending, indeed, much more for its strength upon character than upon incident. It is scarcely possible to decide whether the real or the ideal elements predominate. In the Camp soldiers, in Octavio Piccolomini, in the Countess Terzky, we have the real, clear, and lifelike in every utterance; in Max, and in Thekla, the most exquisite and softened ideal forms of humanity. In the character of Wallenstein, we have the elements blended. It would not have suited Schiller's plan to paint the great leader precisely as history teaches us to believe him moulded. Some leaning towards Wallenstein, some sympathy with his decline and his fate, we must be induced to feel, or the drama would have been a failure. If one single character may be pointed out in which the genius of Schiller reached its full power, that character is Wallenstein. So vivid a picture of human strength and human weakness commingled and alternately overshadowing each other, few poets—none short of the very greatest—have ever embodied. As in life itself, the character of Wallenstein shows according to the side from which you view it. On this side you have such colossal attributes; such a daring, enterprising courage; a heart to which it seems

little to set up a rivalry to the great Imperial power itself ; an ambition for which nothing short of absolute mastery is sufficient ; a genius which can crush every obstacle and difficulty by its own instinctive force. Look on the other side, and you see the hero trembling at unpropitious stars ; vexed with almost insupportable doubt ; caring little for any of the inward promptings of Heaven, but watching with trepid anxiety for every manifestation supposed to shine upon the face of the sky. Too much withdrawn into himself, and careless of all human interest ; and yet attracting such irresistible affection, compelling so much homage : surely a character is here so mysterious, yet so full of reality, so inscrutable, and yet so thoroughly harmonized, that to paint it faithfully in language needed nothing short of consummate art. What Mr. Ruskin says of painting in one of his essays, is singularly true of dramatic literature ; any object or character which you can thoroughly make out at the first glance is not true to nature. Studying the character of Wallenstein, the reader is seldom certain whether to admire its strength or to despise its weakness. It sometimes reminds him possibly of Shakspeare's picture of Julius Cæsar, but that the portrait of Wallenstein is much fuller, larger, and varied with many other elements. Even where Wallenstein shows most of courage and resolution, a strange feeling of pity, if not actually of sympathy, gathers in the mind. Partly this arises from a perception of the counter-schemes which are enmeshing

his plans ; of the counter-plots preparing where he securely reckons upon confederacy ; of the impending downfall of his power just when he believes it is about to be most surely strengthened and raised. But still more, it arises from observation of the internal elements of weakness which the character contains. Schiller's Wallenstein fluctuates on the borders of good and of evil, made wholly for neither. "Why will you consort with us demons," asks Mephistopheles of Faust, "if you have not the nerve to be like us? Why will you attempt to fly, if you are not secure against dizziness?" Wallenstein is like Faust. He has evoked out of his own ambition demons to guide him, but he lacks the nerve to follow unshrinkingly where they lead : he has attempted to fly, but he cannot keep his brain from growing dizzy. He has installed ambition in the place of duty, and thus is urged daringly on ; but he has set up superstition in the shrine of conscience, and thus is forced to tremble and hang back at every move. If we were to judge Wallenstein by the phases of his character actually presented in these dramas, we might be inclined to pronounce him merely weak and vacillating. But the shadow of former greatness follows his steps. We can judge of its actual character by its reflection upon others. We see what the influence is which he produces and has produced upon all who surround him ; and we know that such impress is made by no ordinary character. We are compelled, moreover, to recollect

that our only experience of Wallenstein is at a period of hesitation and forced inaction, peculiarly calculated to bring out and exhibit the special weakness of such a character. Wallenstein stands, in some measure, on the confines of two eras; half belonging to the sinking hemisphere where mere force had rule, half lighted by the rays of the upcoming reign of civilization and thought. He is, in some measure, in advance of his circumstances, but not freed from them. He is the only thinker in his camp: Octavio Piccolomini is prudent and worldly-wise; the Countess Terzky plots and simulates; Max is all chivalry, affection, and generous instinct: Wallenstein alone has any glimpses of contemplation into the relations of man to the world around him, his nature, and his destiny. Meditation which leads to no determination; scepticism in recognised faiths taking its common refuge in superstition; a questioning of the reign of force, and a want of full appreciation of the reign of thought—these qualities add to the indecision and sap the strength of the too thoughtful chieftain and too warlike thinker. The character of Wallenstein, as drawn by Schiller, seems to me wholly a novelty in literature; and a novelty by no means of the Karl Moor stamp, but a permanent and an immortal figure added to those which Homer and Shakspeare and Cervantes have given to the world.

The same praise cannot, indeed, be given to some of the other characters of the drama, but praise, per-

haps, scarcely less high. There is no novelty in the forms of two young and unhappy lovers; but what poet ever produced creations of greater beauty, tenderness, nobleness, purity, than Max and Thekla? What are the sentimental passions, the waxwork groupings of the French classic drama, beside these exquisite figures of pure love and undeserved suffering? Who quarrels with Schiller because he has set into the framework of his great drama two beings somewhat too elevated in feeling, too pure of heart, too unshaded in character, for common human nature? We know that such a being as Max Piccolomini, the very embodiment of all that chivalry strove to be but was not, was scarce likely to have been a nursling of the coarse and profligate camp of Wallenstein. We know that even under its brightest circumstances human nature seldom produces such characters as that of Thekla; and that it was not in the Austrian Court of Ferdinand or the dukedom of Friedland we should expect to find one of those rare examples. But it would indeed be a pedantic realism which would seek to preclude the poet from ever looking for his ideal above the ordinary standard of humanity; or which, at all events, would insist upon his accepting the common types of every-day life as the only realities of nature. One does not readily see why Schiller, any more than Raphael or Canova, should be restrained from endeavouring to embody the highest combination of beauty and of strength which the attributes of

human nature render possible. Enough if it be not something outside nature and out of harmony with itself; and no one will attempt to suggest defects of this character in Schiller's *Max and Thekla*. Schiller may be allowed to have done the world a service morally as well as artistically, when he familiarized it with the idea of two beings so pure, so noble, and yet so entirely human. The character of Thekla is, perhaps, the more distinctly drawn of the two. She presents the more exquisitely blended combination of that softness which in her mother approaches to feebleness, with that courage which in her father's character mounts to daring and harshness. Schiller's artistic creed was, that he who follows out his own art to its fullest development of beauty and of truth, needs no special moral purpose to make his results morally elevating; that the truth and beauty of the art must harmonize with, and form part of, the universal truth and beauty of which religion is to us the highest expression. This character of Thekla is one of the rarest examples to prove how far such a theory may be realized by the intellect and the heart of such a poet. It is only in Shakspeare you can find a picture of womanhood to compare with this of Schiller's. Who, indeed, has ever surpassed in dramatic art this embodiment of woman's highest qualities,—such maidenly softness, such womanly dignity, such a heart, such high principle, such courage, and such love? It speaks more powerfully than any words can express for the genius of the poet, that he has thrown such an

intensity of interest round the character and the fate of Wallenstein, as to make the love, the nobleness, and the misfortunes of two beings like Thekla and Max only subordinate features of the drama. Indeed, Wallenstein himself absorbs so much of the interest, that the reader is at first apt to overlook the skill with which some of the minor characters are delineated. Take the Duchess, Wallenstein's wife, for instance. Could any professedly realistic dramatist have given us within the same limits a more vivid and suggestive portrait of a gentle, kind-hearted, weakly woman, formed indeed, to make some quiet home happy, but shrinking into an almost abject feebleness in the crush of events and the conflict of strong natures amid which she has been thrown ? The reader sometimes cannot repress a sensation akin to contempt for her weakness ; but again, her gentleness, her good-nature, her almost child-like lament for her quiet, happy days of early marriage, melt him into an irresistible sympathy and pity. With so much art is the character suggested rather than expressed, that one thinks he thoroughly comprehends its every phase,—can follow every shade of emotion passing across it ; and yet all that Schiller has put into the mouth of the Duchess amounts to but a few dozen lines.

A character of greater depth and variety, and much more fully drawn, is that of the Countess Terzky,—a fearless, plotting, unscrupulous, yet not unkindly, and, towards her brother-in-law at least, deeply loving woman. A singular instance

of the misapplication of a poet's meaning I remember to have seen some years ago in a quotation borrowed from Countess Terzky. It was set forth as the motto to a biographical semi-philosophical work, and simply bore Schiller's name as if it were a moral text given with the authority of Schiller's own principles. It was the following passage :—

*“Denn Recht hat jeder eigene charakter  
Der ubereinstimmt mit sich selbst: es gibt  
Kein andres Unrecht als den Widerspruch.”*

“For every single character has right  
Which harmonizes with itself: there is  
No other wrong than want of harmony.”

Of course on such a principle anything might be justified. I heard an attempt made to found a whole moral theory upon the lines. Need it be said that Schiller had no such meaning? The lines belong to the Countess Terzky's sophistical and successful effort to persuade Wallenstein that he commits no moral wrong in breaking his faith with the Emperor. To quote them as expressing any principle of Schiller's, is like putting forward some of Lady Macbeth's endeavours to steel her husband against conscience and pity, as the deliberate exposition of Shakspeare's own moral convictions.

*Wallenstein* has, undoubtedly, many dramatic defects. It is so full of mere dialogue that the action sometimes flags heavily, and makes impatient British

readers yearn for the life and motion of our own great dramatist. Towards the catastrophe, it is scarcely endurable to be detained by the epigrammatic persuasions and remonstrances which pass between Butler and Gordon. But who can remember defects of structure when he comes to those solemn and thrilling scenes in which Wallenstein appears for the last time ? What a nameless terror, what a boding sense of some fearful catastrophe, hangs over every line of that passage in which the Countess Terzky, haunted by indefinable presentiments of coming danger, clings to Wallenstein, and vainly endeavours to warn him against some unknown, foreshadowed fate ! The form of Wallenstein, as he stands erect, or strides up and down the chamber, or flings himself into his chair, or gazes out upon the starless sky quivering with an uncertain and weird light, is as that of a man on whom the shadow of death has already fallen. Despite his own assurances, we can read some pre-science of a coming fate in his own words,—in his exquisitely touching tribute to the memory of Max, in his very efforts to cheer his sister-in-law, in his weariness of life-changes and struggles, in his musings on the aspect of the gloomy heaven, in which “the star that beamed upon his life” is seen no more. Many such scenes as this would place Schiller on a level with the greatest poets of any age. I do not think it is uttering a word beyond the barest justice to say that, in its kind, it is unsurpassed by anything in

Shakspeare. Schiller subsequently produced dramas more perfect than *Wallenstein*, but anything to excel these passages he did not, and could not, realize.

The English reader can scarcely be expected to admit himself entirely satisfied with Schiller's *Mary Stuart*. To do justice to its dramatic and poetic merits we, of this country, had better discard from our minds altogether the idea of its being a historical play. It is not, perhaps, more incorrect, as far as mere facts are concerned, than many of Shakspeare's historical dramas ; but it treats of a period in whose events and personages Englishmen feel the deepest interest, and with which they are most familiar. The principal personages of the drama are among those historical characters of which it is most difficult to obtain an impartial view. Schiller was obviously drawn by poetic instinct towards the most favourable estimate of Queen Mary's character. Indeed, the drama would greatly fail in poetic interest, if any other view than this were presented. Accordingly, the central figure is that of a beautiful and injured Queen, a captive in the hands of intriguing and unscrupulous enemies ; her captivity made more dangerous by the rash efforts of unthinking friends, and rendered doubly bitter by the basest treachery where most she turned with love and confidence. The errors of her past life are scarcely more than hinted at, and then only in the redeeming and alluring form of penitence and spontaneous self-humiliation. Elizabeth, on the other hand,

is scarcely treated with justice. For the faults which all admit to have belonged to her, other faults which cannot be justly charged upon her memory are substituted ; and a due meed of respect is not given even to the masculine energy and piercing intellect which no prejudice can deny to her. Selfishness and weakness are made by Schiller her prominent qualities. Her indecision, when the decree of Mary's fate is pressed upon her, is represented as contemptible, and the motive which decides her at last hateful :—

“In vain I hide

The stain upon my birth—a rival's hate  
Has laid it bare : this Stuart stands before me  
Like some eternal, threatening spectre form !  
No, no, this fear and doubt must end at last—  
Her head shall fall—I will, I will have peace !  
She is the haunting Fury of my life ;  
A torturing spirit set on me by Fate.  
Wherever I would fain have planted hope  
Or joy, she like a serpent crossed my way ;  
She tore from me the only one I loved—  
She robbed me of a husband—Mary Stuart  
Is but the name for every pang I've borne !  
Let her but once be blotted out of life,  
Then am I free as are the mountain winds—  
With what a glance of scorn she looked upon me,  
As if her look would strike me to the earth,  
Poor, feeble creature ! I have keener weapons—  
Their touch is deathly—and thou art no more !”

Even then Elizabeth has not the nerve to pronounce her sentence with her own lips ; and it is only by an artifice that she puts in motion the death-warrant

which is to rid her of her rival. Englishmen can scarcely admit this to be a true picture even of the worst failings of Elizabeth ; and the character is one of too deep a historic importance to allow us to appreciate a poetically altered version of it. The portrait too which has been drawn of Burleigh presents that statesman in an extravagantly distorted light (Schiller allowed the noble lord to express himself with much greater distinctness than did Mr. Puff) ; and Leicester, whatever his weaknesses, and whatever even the darker stains which rest, by imputation at least, upon his memory, can scarcely be recognised in the abject and dastardly traitor and liar drawn by Schiller. Perhaps, indeed, the principal objection to the drama in the eyes of Englishmen, is not that the personages are exaggerated in their historic attributes, but that the people of the tragedy have no resemblance in good or evil to their nominal prototypes at all ; and that Schiller only used certain celebrated names to put upon the stage figures which have no other relationship whatever to the personages in English history whose titles they borrow.

These are strong objections to the drama special to this country, and probably for these reasons English readers generally do not render justice to its great poetic merits. When the celebrated Italian actress, Madame Ristori, during one of her visits to our country, appeared on successive nights alternately as Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart, popular admiration seemed entirely to run in favour of the former personation,

although the Mary Stuart was that of Schiller's exquisitely poetical tragedy, and the Queen Elizabeth was the principal character of a piece of vulgar Italian stage-play, heavy with inflated commonplaces, and ludicrous with the most amusing anachronisms.

Exquisitely poetical indeed, and full of occasional flashes of fiery energy, is this drama, although scarcely to be classed among Schiller's masterpieces. It ought to have stood in point of time immediately after *Don Carlos*; to which, in despite of critical opinion generally, I think it decidedly superior. Coming as it did after *Wallenstein*, it cannot be read in its order of succession without impressing on the mind the sense of comparative failure. But its special merits are great, and even those who disparage it allow that it might have made the renown of an ordinary poet. The very character of Elizabeth, if we leave history out of the question, is drawn with great skill; its pride and its weakness, its selfishness and its self-deception, are blended with a hand of marvellous cunning. The contrast between the rival Queens is intensely dramatic and (again leaving history aside) unexaggerated. Mary is frail only on the side of the affections; Elizabeth's weakness is wholly personal and selfish. Mary has fallen, because she has loved too much and too unwisely; Elizabeth is kept erect by the restraint of worldly prudence and cunning. The good and the bad qualities in each arise from opposite sources, and conduct to opposite results. The scene

in which the two women meet has often been quoted as one of the finest and most striking in German literature. Elizabeth cannot restrain her pride and triumph, when she sees her rival at last a self-humiliated suppliant before her. She has suffered wrong at Mary's hands, and danger at the hands of her friends, and she cannot resist the temptation to give utterance to some words of exultation over the disarmed enemy and the humbled rival. But Mary, who has nerved herself to bear coldness, harshness, even reproaches, cannot endure the sting of some of the taunts of Elizabeth ; and, after several strong efforts to repress her rising emotion, suddenly bursts out with that wild energy which sometimes flashes up in the hearts of the weak, and sweeps her rival from her presence with a torrent of invective, followed by a shower of bitter words, every one of which blisters where it falls. Mary has won in that encounter ; but she has bought the moment's triumph with her life. It would be a waste of time to point out that all this, though quite in harmony with the spirit of Schiller's drama, has not much relation to historical probability ; and that nothing can be more unlike the strong, self-governed mind of Elizabeth than thus to have engaged in a public taunting-match with a keen-tongued and desperate enemy. It is not more out of historical truth than most of the other incidents of the play, and it is in the most perfect keeping with the characters Schiller has drawn.

Of a more touching interest are some passages in the closing scenes. Mary's farewell to her women, as she stands almost on the very steps of the scaffold, reminds the reader, in its quiet pathos and simple beauty, of Beatrice's closing words in *The Cenci* :—

“ Farewell, my Margaret—Alice, fare thee well—  
Burgoyne, I thank thee for thy faithful service,—  
Thy lips burn hot, my Gertrude !—I have been  
Hated indeed, but O ! I have been loved !  
A noble husband make my Gertrude happy,  
For such a glowing heart has need of love !  
My Bertha, thou hast chosen the better part :  
The pious bride of Heaven thou wilt become—  
O, hasten to fulfil thy sacred vow ;  
Deceitful are the fairest gifts of earth ;  
That learn here of thy Queen !”

The tragedy of *Mary Stuart* has, however, one deficiency which almost inevitably withdraws it from the rank of dramatic works of the highest order. It wants character: every one of its personages is not an individuality. Take away Elizabeth and Mary, and perhaps also the ardent young Mortimer, and the rest of the *dramatis personæ* are but names. The treachery of Leicester, and the wiles of Burleigh, are but treachery and wiles written out. It is here that Schiller, in this and others of his dramas, falls below Shakspeare and Goethe, and even below his own best efforts. Every one in Shakspeare, from the King of Denmark down to the grave-digger, has individuality; even one grave-digger is not the same as another. In

the earlier parts of *Faust* and of *Wilhelm Meister*, in *Wallenstein* and *William Tell*, the same life-drawing is displayed. No reader can fail to appreciate the distinct individuality of every soldier introduced in *Wallenstein's Camp*; of every mountaineer confederate who repairs to the trysting-place in *William Tell*. Without this characteristic there may be a very great poem; but the drama which has it not wants an essential element of durability. It is in this that Shakespeare leaves every rival behind,—those of his own age and country, some of whom are his greatest rivals, among the number. It is in this that he always surpasses Massinger, who in many other great dramatic qualities, occasionally at least approaches him. It is this which gives his works their universality; which makes them inexhaustible in their infinite variety as human nature or human society itself. It is not merely dramatic intensity; for it would be rash to say that anything in modern literature surpasses the intensity of some scenes in *Wallenstein* and *William Tell*. It is not in pathos: for it is scarcely possible to imagine anything at once more deeply and more simply pathetic than the close of the first part of *Faust*. It is not in sublimity: for surely the Greek dramatists produced passages of thrilling sublimity which are destined never to be out-rivaled. It is not in the conception of noble self-devotion of character: for did not Corneille produce a Polyeucte? But the faculty which gives Shakspeare a pre-eminence over every dramatist

of older or younger time, is the power to produce an endless variety of characters, every one of which has a personality of its own, stamped as nature herself stamps it; each not extravagantly unlike others of its class, but each so distinctly endowed with peculiar qualities of its own, that it can never be long confounded with its nearest likeness. You may, by close observation, discover a greater difference between Dromio and Dromio, between Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse, than you can between any two of the ordinary characters, not purposely contrasted, of some of the great French dramatists.

Now this test the tragedy of *Mary Stuart* will not bear. All the life that is in it, is breathed into the two central figures: the rest are but names and voices; “their bones are marrowless, their blood is cold.” Like many others of Schiller’s works, it is a poem rather than a drama. To produce the greatest of poems and the greatest of dramas at once, is a triumph of genius no German ever attained. In our own country the miserable sentimentalities and spurious morality of Kotzebue, made, if possible, more miserable by the most wretched of translations, have caused more theatres to fill, and more eyes to overflow, than the noblest efforts of Racine or of Schiller ever did. Mr. Carlyle remarks that when German readers were rapturous about *Wallenstein*, English audiences were shuddering with awe-stricken delight at *The Castle Spectre*. The truth is, Schiller’s dramas are not for

our stage. *The Maid of Orleans* would not have the slightest chance with most audiences against *The Lady of Lyons*. Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* would probably be considered a very commonplace and unheroic affair, when contrasted with Sheridan Knowles's drama of the same name. To surpass the poet in the closet, and the playwright on the stage, was the lot of only one man in the modern world.

I have had, hitherto, only to speak of Shakspeare and Schiller contrasted in order to assign to the great German an inferior place. But these two poets in one instance have selected the same historic character to work upon ; and if we are just and candid, we shall instantly allow that, in his delineation of the Maid of Orleans, Schiller has triumphed over the corresponding work of his great predecessor. It is true that Joan of Arc is only an incidental figure in the play of Shakspeare, while the Maid of Schiller's drama is his deliberate choice and the object of his lavish care : but both characters are sufficiently distinct for comparison, and it is impossible not to see how entirely superior is the picture drawn by the German poet. We in England are usually so deeply impressed with the genius of Shakspeare, and we find so much more of what is great grow upon us the more we study him, that it seems strange to admit any circumstances to have given to another poet that superiority, even for once, which none could have had by the force of genius.

But will the First Part of *King Henry the Sixth* favourably compare with Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*? Above all, how will Shakspeare's conception of Joan of Arc compare with Schiller's? It would be unreasonable, perhaps, to complain because Shakspeare did not view the character of the Maid of Orleans with a mind wholly free from the vulgar prejudices of his people and his age; but even when every allowance is made for him on this score, I cannot help thinking the portrait he has drawn of the woman who led the armies of France to their most remarkable victories, one which is emphatically unworthy of his genius.

The name of Joan of Arc will at once suggest to the reader at least three famous—perhaps I should rather say, two famous and one infamous—poetic renderings of the character of this most remarkable of historic women. Three men, each in some sense the representative of his age and nation, embodied according to their own views or purposes the ideal of Joan of Arc. These men were Shakspeare, Voltaire, and Schiller. In Shakspeare's drama we have some of the prejudiced ideas of his own age, put forward from the English and Protestant side. Shakspeare's Joan of Arc is, therefore, a clever, daring, coarse-tongued, ambitious woman; who has sold her soul to the powers of evil, partly perhaps for the sake of national triumph, but more for the love of personal glory and power; and who is deserted in the end by

the fiends she has served, and handed over to an ignominious death. . Her brightest triumphs are won but by artifice. She bandies coarse jests with her enemies ; she jeers over the putrifying dead bodies of great foes fallen ; she rejects with brutal contempt the paternal claims of her poor old father ; and descends to the basest of conceivable subterfuges to escape, even for a brief respite, the death to which her familiar demons have at length abandoned her. Here we have simply the vulgarest view which floated across Shakspeare's age, in which national animosity and detestation of the Romish religion decided every question, however remotely connected with either. The only explanation of the wonders performed in battle against English adversaries, by a French peasant girl, must be to pronounce her an audacious strumpet, who had sold her soul to the devil, and invoked the powers of hell to her aid. It is quite true that even Shakspeare's Joan of Arc is considerably in advance of the character drawn by chroniclers on the English side before his time. He has given her at least a certain power of eloquence and attractiveness, and, up to her closing scene, some courage, and some genuine love of country. Excuses enough may be found for Shakspeare having adopted such a view as he did of this character ; but it is an unreasonable degree of idolatry, on the part of English critics, to endeavour to persuade us into admiration of it. The truth is, that if the First Part of *King Henry the Sixth* must

be admitted to have come from Shakspeare's hand at all, it is probably the lowest thing which bears his name, and the character of Joan of Arc the lowest portion of it. Voltaire's *La Pucelle* scarcely deserves any notice. Two excuses, if excuse can possibly be found for such a production, may be discovered in the fact, that Voltaire lived at a time and in a nation where religion was made the mask of the most detestable hypocrisy ; and that the poem was intended as a burlesque upon a dull and pompous *Pucelle* written by Jean Chapelain. Voltaire might, indeed, be pardoned, if he could not readily connect the idea of a Roman Catholic miracle with anything but trickery, baseness, and profligacy. Possibly a very small number of readers will think the wit and the satire, both of the keenest and most undeniable power, with which every page of the poem is filled, some atonement for its general character. But most people who have read it, will agree with us in feeling that when every possible allowance has been made, Voltaire's poem still remains an everlasting dishonour, a monument of shame, to the literature of his country. Even if it were possible to have a good purpose in such a work, no purpose could in the slightest degree atone for the unmanly and heartless indecency which pollutes every page of it. It is gratifying to know that even genius and wit have not been able to save such a book from oblivion ; that nothing, indeed, rescues it from public infamy but public forgetfulness. It would be un-

coming, even for the sake of the contrast, to compare such a work as this with Schiller's sublime idealization.

Schiller's representation of the Maid of Orleans is in every respect the very opposite to that of Shakespeare. As Shakespeare accepted the very lowest form of the Protestant prejudices of his day, Schiller seized the very highest and purest type of Roman Catholic idealism. Schiller's Joanna is of course the principal figure in the drama ; Shakespeare's Joan but a secondary and inferior agent. The Joan of Shakespeare holds interviews on the stage with fiends from hell ; the Joanna of Schiller is lifted into an almost visible apotheosis by the special interposition of Heaven. Shakespeare's Joan spurns her old shepherd-father with curses and contempt ; Schiller's Joanna calmly lays down hope and glory, and submits unmurmuring to the cruellest accusations, because they came from a father whose very superstitions she feels bound to obey with a silent submission. Shakespeare's Joan dies a shameful death, made more shameful still by the base expedient to which she has recourse to prolong her life ; Schiller's Joanna expires peaceful, happy, and glorified. Both poets took the fullest liberty with history : probably Schiller departed the farthest from actual fact ; for he made his heroine die a death of triumph and of glory, not at a stake piled by exulting enemies, but on a victorious battle-field, with the King and the knighthood of France in almost adoring groups around her. But, of the two, Shak-

speare has surely departed most from the truthful view of the character of the remarkable enthusiast whom he painted as so coarse, despicable, and base. It is probable that Schiller has done but scant justice to stout old John Talbot ; and Shakspeare, on the other hand, has not been very impartial in his picture of the French chivalry. There is indeed far more of camp and life reality about some of Shakspeare's scenes than in the parallel passages of Schiller's drama. But it would scarcely have suited Schiller's purpose to paint camp manners in his tragedy so very like camp manners as Shakspeare has done. The atmosphere of the drama would have been thickened and sullied by such realities as these. Perhaps the whole comparison is an unjust one. We must remember that we are comparing that which is in one sense the very highest effort of the German poet's genius with a drama so much inferior to any other of Shakspeare's, that some critics have been led to doubt whether it ever came from his hand at all. It would indeed be, as Coleridge remarks, a very rash or ignorant person who should attempt to compare Schiller with Shakspeare. Compared with Shakspeare's genius, that of Schiller is narrow and almost monotonous. But it is merely an impulse of unreasoning national prejudice which could set these two dramas side by side, and expect us to declare that Shakspeare's is the greater.

Nothing of Schiller's deserves so thoroughly the title of sublime as the *Jungfrau von Orleans*. It would

be injustice to compare it with any drama wrought upon a similar theme short of Shakspeare's. As a specimen of ideal art it is probably the finest in modern literature. Massinger's *Virgin Martyr* would seem poor and vulgar in comparison. Schiller's Maid of Orleans is a being inspired from her childhood to act a great part. She is absorbed, and, in times of action, wholly lost as to individuality in it. Supernatural aid guides and follows her throughout. Schiller has removed his heroine quite out of the limits which admit of mere psychological explanation. He has made her something more than an enthusiast even of the loftiest and most irresistible kind. He distinctly indicates her to be a person uplifted everywhere by a hand extended from the worlds beyond our sight. In thus removing his subject entirely beyond the limitations of the real or even the possible, Schiller was enabled to give his drama a harmony and a meaning which otherwise could scarcely have belonged to it. All that was noble and solemn in the old Roman Catholic spirit of unconditional obedience and unquestioning self-sacrifice, he has preserved, and has eliminated every feature which could excite a repelling sensation. Such passive and self-abandoning submission as Joanna shows upon some occasions, would seem abject if it were submission to the dogmas of a Church or a priest; but every such suggestion vanishes before the element of direct celestial agency which Schiller has had the courage to introduce. You abandon probability when

you read the drama, but you are compensated amply by the harmony and beauty which are gained ; indeed, no one must enter upon a perusal of the play with any questionings as to probability at all, or even possibility, or historical correctness of any kind. The camp of Charles was not, we can all understand, precisely that which Schiller has painted it. He kept the dissoluteness and the follies of the age quite out of sight. It might have suited an inferior artist to heighten the supernatural effect of the beauty and purity of his heroine by a perpetual contrast with worldliness, and coarseness, and vice ; but it would have been wholly out of keeping with the harmony of Schiller's purpose. One may find innumerable pedantic faults with the structure of the play ; but when all this has been done, its immortal beauty and sublimity still remain.

True to the old spirit of Roman Catholic self-enthralment, Joanna must admit no woman's weakness, no love, no pity even, to stay her purpose for a moment. The affections of the heart must be deadened as well as the quivering of the nerves. With the one throb of womanly love which she cannot repress, her spiritual power is for the time enfeebled, and she recognises it, and submits to calumny, exile, and contempt with just the same meekness with which she had borne glory and adoration. Scarcely is there in any dramatist a scene more thrilling than that in which she is accused of witchcraft before the King and the knights by her besotted and superstitious father.

She is implored by those who still believe her innocent to repel the accusation by one word or sign ; but in unquestioning submission to what she believes Heaven's rebuke for a moment's weakness, she will utter no word of self-vindication. Dunois, faithful in defiance of all appearance, flings down his knightly gauntlet in her defence, and is answered by that peal of thunder which seems to the superstitious hearts around Heaven's own reply and sentence. Schiller's highest quality is not pathos ; but who can think him wanting in it after having read the last scene of this drama, in which Joanna, once more permitted to give victory to France, and wounded to the death in the attempt, appeals in such simple and childlike words to all around to affirm her proved innocence, and begs that the banner which she has borne in so much triumph may be given her to clasp in dying : "Not without my banner may I go up THERE !"

But it is not in the supernatural element of the character alone that the highest artistic effect is produced. Joanna is of kin to us all ; she has the feelings of humanity and womanhood. She has not chosen her part ; she loves not war or glory ; but she has been called, and she has obeyed the call ; she has been faithful even to slaying. Heart-throbbings, deep unquenchable womanly longings for that love which must never be hers, sometimes stream through her impassioned and inspired being. She is but of earth, after all, and no

marble image of a saint—no monumental alabaster. While the work to which she has been summoned is going on, she will think of nothing else ; but when the rush of battle and the glory of victory cease for a moment, then she puts off the supernatural, and is a lonely, longing woman again. Exquisitely touching are her meditations when left for a chance moment at peace and alone ; her yearnings for the quiet home she has left for ever ; her prophetic knowledge that the freedom she wins for her country will bring no happiness to herself. No one comes near her who is not exalted by the influence of her presence ; no nature is not softened by her, except, indeed, the leaden heart of her superstitious father. Did Schiller mean to typify the fact, that any intellect may be influenced, any nature softened, but those which have steeped themselves in senseless superstition, and which claim, by the virtue of their own stupidity and cruelty, infallible wisdom and arbitrary power ? Even the pitiless Isabeau feels something like a throb of sympathy for Joanna in her banishment and captivity.

“ Banished because thou hast from ruin saved him—  
Hast set the crown upon his head at Rheims,  
Hast made him monarch over all of France,—  
Banished for this ! Ay, there I know my son.”

What a passionate prayer is that which Joanna sends up for freedom from her bonds when captive within sight of the defeat of the French arms !

"Hear me, O God, in this my highest need !  
Upward to Thee, in burning supplication  
Into Thy very heaven I send my soul.  
Thou canst the meshes of a spider's web  
Make strong as is the cable of a ship ;  
Light is it to Thy power the brazen bonds  
Into the slenderest spider's thread to change ;  
Thou willest it, and lo ! these chains shall fall,  
These tower-walls rend asunder.—Thou didst give  
Thy help to Samson when in chains and blind  
Under the bitter gibings of his foes  
He stood and suffered ! Trusting unto Thee  
He grasped the pillars of his prison-house,  
And bowed him down and crushed his foes in ruin !"

Who will interpose to tell us, that the miraculous bursting of her chains, her electrifying appearance in the flying ranks of the French, and the rally and the victory which follow her, are violations of historic possibility and dramatic unity ? Such efforts of genius make laws for literature. We may safely affirm that any critical rules which conduct us to the condemnation of the structure of this noble drama, are proved to be absurd by the very conclusions which follow from them. But, indeed, they who are not familiar with this tragedy, can scarcely appreciate the difficulty which criticism must have in preserving its impartiality while studying it. Who ever read it without emotion ? Greater monuments of genius the world has preserved ; a nobler result of heart and genius working together it has scarcely seen. Not from the imagination or the intellect alone was such a creation evolved. The pure and noble heart of Schiller sent its own

exalted aspirations and emotions thrilling along every line of it. No age and no nation ever can be so elevated in intellect and so refined in feeling as not to acquire new intellectual exaltation and moral improvement from the study and the appreciation of such a masterpiece of spiritualized art.

The best tribute one can pay to the genius of Schiller is to say that even this tragedy was not his greatest ; that his fame would have wanted something, had his career ended even with the *Maid of Orleans*. He never reached a higher point of the merely ideal ; but if there were anything wanting to the drama I have last described, it was something of a clearer and firmer reality ; something of that strength which is to be obtained only from the elements of living humanity. This, too, it was Schiller's triumph to attain. There was a pause, however, before this greatest and last success. Schiller experimented in a new direction, and produced *The Bride of Messina*, constructed on the idea of the ruling destiny of the Greek drama, and with something of the Greek dramatic structure. The attempt, like most other efforts to reproduce Greek styles of art under modern conditions, was so far a failure ; and with all its lyric beauty, and its wild glimpses of passion and pathos, I regard this drama as one of the least successful of Schiller's maturer years, and in this place therefore demanding from me no more than this brief record.

So far as we have gone, the class of dramas which

Schiller produced may be said to hold something of a mediate position between Shakspeare and the French classic school. Even the very greatest of the French dramatists appear to have drawn their characters at second-hand, as if from painting or sculpture. In marble a figure can express mainly but one emotion, as it can only represent the action of one instant of time. You cannot, by any skill of sculptor, chisel a form which will give the idea of a being whose mood is divided by conflicting passions and opposing characteristics, and allow to each its proportionate prominence. This is in the very nature of the art itself, and does not detract from its fullest objects. The French classic dramatists appear to apply to the drama the laws of sculpture, and to believe that the unity of their purpose would harmonize only with individualized expressions of one tone of character. Embodied emotions, allegorical types of distinct shades of human character, fill the French dramas; but we do not find there the men and women of nature and of Shakspeare. It is impossible to select any character out of the whole range of Shakspeare's dramas, and say that it personifies this or that passion or emotion, and nothing more. No man or woman in real life does so, and Shakspeare's life is real life. Schiller stands, in this respect, far nearer to Shakspeare than the very greatest of the French dramatists; but between Shakspeare and him there is yet a considerable interval. Only in the drama of

*Wilhelm Tell* does he appear to us to stand upon the Shakspearean level; and to contemplate human nature with a gaze like that which saw in living humanity the elements of an Othello and a Mercutio, a Hamlet and a Falstaff. Only into *William Tell* can you pass from the study of any of Shakspeare's dramas, and not feel that you have lost somewhat of your hold upon the firm earth of human existence.

What would any inferior author have made of the character of William Tell? If ever there was in history a legend or subject especially tempting to mediocrity, especially suggestive of melo-dramatic sentiment and cheap splendour, it is surely the story of William Tell. Here was an opportunity to hold up to the world a somewhat purified kind of Karl Moor, storming against tyranny in every line, blazing out with resonant appeals to liberty, and declamatory apostrophizings of the eternal mountains, and the lakes, and the wild eagles of Switzerland! How the young author of *The Robbers* would have glowed over such a theme, and set Germany a-flame with his burning rhetoric! We have an example in our own literature, to show how a man of no mean abilities can treat such a subject. Sheridan Knowles was a man of decent dramatic power; perhaps, on the whole, the most popular English dramatist of our later days; and yet a comparison between his *William Tell* and Schiller's will precisely illustrate how different a thing is genius from mere dramatic

talent. What manner of man is Schiller's William Tell? Just what the real man must, in all probability, have been; a man on whom in real life a prominent and a trying part is forced, not like one acting the same part with prepared effect for the admiration of a theatre. Schiller's Tell is a manly, grave, affectionate, unpretending mountaineer; loving his wife and children in simple peasant fashion; entirely unromantic, except in so far as every daring and unformulistic nature partakes of romance; content with the ordinary toils of his life; performing his feats of strength, skill, and daring, not as feats, but merely as a blacksmith wields an enormous hammer, or a sailor goes aloft in a night of storm, because it is his business and his duty, without difficulty or fear, but without the slightest idea of display or ostentation,—indeed, without a personal or subjective thought upon the matter at all. Tell is a man superior to his class, not so much in culture as in intellect: he is superior to men of his class in other countries, not because of his higher civilization, but very much for the same reasons which would make a Red Indian superior in personal dignity to a Guinea Negro. He has lived a lonely and silent life among the mountains, and has acquired something of their silence. He is nothing of a talker; there is no touch whatever of the stump orator about him. When any needful deed is to be done, he will do it, even if no one else will; but he cares little for discussing the subject before or after.

He has had his own thoughts about the condition of his country ; but he has said little, and seems at first to see no prospect of any call upon his own exertions or personal interference. Indeed, he has thought of his country's sufferings only in a distinct human way, and by no means in an abstract form ; he has seen people suffer, and he has deeply felt for them ; but he has uttered little about fatherland and *freiheit* in the approved Teutonic fashion of patriotism. Just the man most likely to be dangerous to a despot when pushed too far ; but probably also just the man a dull selfish despot would see little reason to dread. He is not one of those who are engaged in the first conspiracy ; he does not make one at that meeting—with what simple sublimity described !—by the Lake of the Four Cantons. When appealed to on the subject, his answer is characteristic :—

“ In what you do, leave me out of your counsel ;  
I cannot bear long choosing, long debate ;  
But if you need me for some certain deed,  
Then call on Tell, be sure he will not fail.”

Even when summoned to bow before Gessler’s hat, he is quiet, and utterly unmelodramatic. There is no wild outburst about tyranny, no passionate appeal to human rights. When he refused his homage, he had no thought of giving any special offence :—

"Forgive me, noble Sir—from thoughtlessness,  
Not disregard of you, it has occurred—  
Were I more prudent, I should not be Tell:  
I ask your pardon—it shall no more happen."

Can there be altogether a more uninteresting personage to the lover of the romantic and the grand ? How Kotzebue would have despised such quietness and simplicity ! Can we believe that Lord Lytton really admires this play ? Read the drama, study this character, and see what simple grandeur, what depth of meaning lie in it. A finer piece of art than the blending of this one character lives not in literature. What a manly strength of mind, what an untaught dignity, what a clear intellect, lie under the silent homeliness of this mountaineer ! With an art wholly indescribable, Schiller has infused something of the character of the regions in which his hero lived, (regions which the poet never saw,) into every phase of the nature he pictures. Tell could not have been the nursling of a flat country. We cannot think of him but as a man whose moods lonely ravines, and wastes of snow, and mountain-peaks, have helped to fashion. There are the steady nerves of one whose existence every day depends upon a clear eye, cool head, and firm, deliberate action ; the laconic speech of one who lives much alone ; the short, emphatic utterances of one who, when he speaks at all, has to speak most commonly where the meaning of no accent must be lost ; the thoughts of one whom a life both active and

secluded allows to think, but not to brood or indulge in reverie. No other circumstances, no other regions, could have fashioned such a man. His language is of that proverbial, sometimes almost epigrammatic, character, which a mountaineer of more thought than culture naturally adopts. When he thinks, it is only in the simple, personal way, natural to a man who has lived all his life in one place, who has neither read nor travelled, who sees things going wrong or right about him, and is concerned by them, but has scarcely any power of generalizing or taking any abstract view of them.

Quite different are some of the other people of the drama. Quite different, for instance, is Attinghausen. He and those of his class are men of rank and influence. The condition of the country and its government affect them like individual responsibilities. They have education such as belonged to their times ; they have the traditions of their ancestors ; they know what the governments of other countries are, and what national liberty means. All these circumstances have a still higher effect when quickened by the generous enthusiasm of youth and womanhood in Bertha. But Tell is emphatically the man of action ; not of education, not of meditation, not of sentiment. He has his superstitions, like all others of his age and class ; and, whatever the evident force of his natural intellect, he is still in no way projected out of the framework of the age and the circumstances in which he lived. To

serve a friend, a neighbour, or even a stranger, to guard wife and child, or to avenge a wrong done to them, this is a man to do anything and dare anything. When Switzerland arms for her deliverance, he will be in the very front of her battle, braving danger there just as he braved the storm to save poor Baumgarten, because it is the impulse of his soul to do it, not from any settled maxims of patriotism in the one instance, or neighbourly duty in the other. You may easily find a grander character; but a truer one no literature can contain. What a scene is that—incomparable to any out of Shakspeare—where Tell sits down in the pass of Küssnacht to wait for his enemy! People come up and talk to him, and endeavour to draw him into gossip. He blends all that is said into some muttered connexion with his own wrongs and his own determination. The music of a wedding-festival rings down the ravine where he sits brooding upon the deed he is about to do, and unconsciously, irresistibly, mingling in every reply he utters to the babble poured into his ear some reference to his own purpose and his own emotions. Nothing I know of is like to this scene in intensity, unless it be that in *Macbeth*, where the murderer endeavours to listen and reply to the conversation of the attendant Thanes, while he waits in an agony of expectancy for the cry of murder which he knows another moment or two must inevitably produce. Perhaps with this thrilling scene the drama ought to have closed. With the slaying of Gessler by

Tell's hand, and the wild outburst of long-stifled national energy which follows, such a work of genius should have found its natural culmination. But with whatever slight defects of structure, this *William Tell* remains, in my opinion, the noblest, as it was the last, of Schiller's works. From *The Robbers* to this masterpiece of genius, what a distance, and in how short a time, has the poet traversed! If *William Tell* may not be placed wholly upon a level with one of Shakspeare's tragedies, there is, at least, no other author of the modern dramatic schools who has surpassed it. In its simplicity and its clearly ordered groupings, it reminds one of those Greek dramatists whom French authors so laboured to imitate and were so utterly unlike. The resemblance here lies only in the organic affinity of genius to genius, and not in any imitation of structure, or copying of style. Our own *Lear* and *Hamlet* do not belong more entirely to the literature of England, than the immortal scenes of *William Tell* to that great German literature, on whose roll it can only be said that Schiller's name has not the foremost place.

As a balladist, the characteristics of Schiller's style contrast more obviously perhaps with those of Goethe than even in his dramas. Schiller is more animated, more popular, more thrilling, perhaps, in some few of his ballads; but he has not the infinite variety, nor that nameless grace of exquisite expression condensed

into the quintessence of beauty and force, which in the minor poems of Goethe bid defiance to translators. Schiller's are more full, but less intense; more eloquent, but less penetrating; more rich in colour, but with less variety of shade and hue. Probably Schiller's *Song of the Bell* is in its own kind unparalleled—certainly not to be surpassed—in modern literature. It must be owned that Goethe has rarely even attempted such a splendid lyrical effort. Some of his most exquisite scraps of song seem like mere curiosities when placed beside this noble ballad of Schiller's. Of its own kind, too, and viewed of course merely in the poetic acceptation which its author meant for it, it would be difficult to find a more beautiful piece of lyric composition than the lament for *The Gods of the Grecian Land*. The charm of Schiller's ballads is a lofty species of poeticized eloquence, lifted altogether beyond the common range of thought and of language, elevating the souls of those who read into regions of ideal beauty, into aspirations and hopes quite out of the atmosphere of every-day existence. The peculiarity of Goethe's ballad style is that it reflects every conceivable mood of the human mind, every phase of human feeling, and ranges over the widest variety of emotions in the rapidest transition, in language generally simple and sometimes bare, but always musical, always graceful, and often thrilling the senses through with some phrase of indescribable beauty, some word or two of

piercing pathos. Goethe delighted to mirror in his verse every shade and every gleam passing across the heart of mere humanity. Schiller only loved to range among those elevated regions above ordinary inhabitings to which his freest moods of mind naturally lifted themselves in longing. The one was content to make the best of reality as it was, and to seek his materials within its limitations. The other clung to literature and poetry because they raised him beyond routine existence into that “ideal” which he so longingly contemplated, and so touchingly apostrophized in song.

Schiller’s career closed fittingly with his *Wilhelm Tell*. Life had long been with him but a slow struggle with disease; and on the 9th of May, 1805, death had conquered all its power could touch. Schiller’s end was singularly peaceful. When asked just before his death how he felt, his answer was in the memorable words, “Calmer and calmer.” Lives like Schiller’s should indeed grow calmer as they near their close. Germany may well prize the memory of such a man; and she is fully privileged and entitled to honour her poet dead whom she did not neglect while living. None of the bitter feelings which cling around the memories of other great men will strike like a discord among the tones of his posthumous praise. His life was not, indeed, on the whole one of happiness and brightness; but he suffered at least none of that early neglect which has clouded the

whole career of so many other men of genius. He no sooner stepped forward as an author than his nation recognised him, made a place for him, and proclaimed his victory already won. His fame did not come to him, as to so many others, a late and unavailing compensation for the bloom and brightness of life worn away in uncheered and unrecognised struggle. The world did not, as it has done in so many other instances, suppress its plaudits until they could no longer reach the ears or the heart of the poet. Schiller was but a boy when he won renown. One single effort placed him among the foremost of his day, and from that moment he never lost and never will lose the position he so early reached. Young authors who cannot find enterprising and appreciative publishers the very moment they look for them, may gather encouragement or learn modesty from the fact that Schiller had to print his *Robbers*, even as Goethe did his *Goetz von Berlichingen*, at his own expense. But the awakening spirit of German literature was singularly quick to recognise and generous to honour any new indication of genius; and Schiller found, as Goethe had done, a public not only encouraging but enthusiastic. Indeed, as I have already pointed out, the chief danger which awaited Schiller was that of a public so enraptured with an immature and youthful effort as to afford what might have been fatal encouragement to a man of more vanity and less self-sustainment. Germany may look back upon the life

of her great dramatist with a pride unmingled with bitterness. If his career was short, it was singularly full; and his death was like a hero's at the moment of victory. He exemplified in his conduct his own noble lesson, and reverenced when a man the dreams of his youth. That love of liberty, that sympathy with humanity, which had been the passion of his boyhood, only grew calmer, deeper, more expansive, with the growth of his intellect. The somewhat extravagant ideas of liberty and emancipated reason into which Schiller plunged from the thraldom of his school-days, scarcely need excuse. Few generous, high-spirited young men avoid passing through an era when they are filled with a passionate thirst to set about altering the whole scheme of the world, and to regenerate everything after the Medea-caldron process. Schiller had just arrived at this stage, when he broke from his school imprisonment; and it would have been out of all reason to expect from such a youth, under such circumstances, a philosophic deference to rule and custom. But there never was a man less inclined towards turbulence of any kind than Schiller. The French Revolution appeared to him at first, as it did to so many other enthusiastic and noble natures, a kind of social *renaissance*, a new birth of thought, a new dawn of a better civilization, like the advent of Christianity, or the upspringing of the Reformation. It seemed to him, as it did to so many others, the realizing of all his early hopes and

dreams of a social condition in which the laws of brotherhood, and morals, and religion, should supersede the governments of Kings, and the authority of mere force. But he soon discovered his mistake. Early in the progress of the Revolution, he saw the ruin which was falling upon his hopes; and he meditated addressing in his own name—one which had its influence then among all followers of liberty—a manly appeal to France, against the course of self-destroying madness into which the new freedom was precipitating itself. The wild crash which immediately followed, and the blood-deluge over which in France scarce any mountain top appeared, and scarce any ark of safety bore its burden, soon rendered all thought of any such mild intercession futile and hopeless. It was abandoned, and with it Schiller's faith in the French Revolution; but not with it his love for liberty. To the honour both of his intellect and his heart, disappointment did not produce one shade of change in his manly sympathy with the true freedom of humanity. In one of his bitter epigrams, Goethe recommends men to rid the world of a young enthusiast, because inevitable disappointment is sure to convert him into a hypocrite and a villain. This was not written, such satire has no force, in regard to hearts and intellects like those of Schiller. Nothing of the best part of his youthful nature but developed and grew better with his growing years. The regrets which some readers perhaps cannot help feeling, on

grounds more especially affecting religious faith, it is no part of mine to discuss. I think it enough to know that the heart of Schiller always longed for the pure Truth, and to trust that in the end he found it.





## Pierre Jean de Beranger.

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O man probably ever during his own lifetime enjoyed more of a poet's fame than the great singer whose name is the title of this chapter. He was the first lyrical poet in his own country, acknowledged, and without the most distant rivalry. He was recognised as the first French lyrical poet by the world. He was the most popular among the multitude and the most admired by the few. Many great Frenchmen, honoured by the name of poet in their own country, Englishmen look on as verse-rhetoricians, verserators; but this was a very poet. He was, indeed, far more literally "the poet of all circles" than the lyrist to whom these words were applied. He had the happy characteristic of combining in himself many of the greatest attributes of the national genius of many countries. He had the grace, the fire, the vivid force of his own people. He had the simplicity which is rarely a companion of French genius. He had the

truest poet-soul, in a country whose literature is more deficient perhaps than that of any other in Europe in what may be called the inmost poetic element. Some of his ballads are exquisite curiosities of art, as well as great organs to stir the souls of nations. They may be compared to statues which on the top of a column delight the distant spectator by their noble outlines and symmetrical proportions, and amaze the critical artist when more closely viewed by their elaborateness of detail and minute perfection.

But if Béranger was universal in the characteristics and elements of his genius, he was essentially national in feeling and spirit. As politician, satirist, and poet, he was a true Frenchman. He was the poet of Love and Glory, each after the newest and oldest French fashion. People used to be in the habit of speaking of Béranger as a poet of liberty, another Tyrtæus or Körner. But it would be difficult to find a true song of freedom in all the collection which Béranger has bequeathed to the world. The glory of the nation, not the freedom and happiness of the people, was the theme which animated, inspired, and enraptured him. To see France the mistress of nations, led every year to new fields of triumph by a beloved and resistless dictator, was the longing which thrilled through his verses. His poet-dreams deified Napoleon. The lyrist cannot be expected to fall into a rapture about an abstract principle; and the victor of Marengo was to the poet the embodiment of French glory and the

missionary of France's destiny. The greatest general of France had therefore the greatest lyrist of France to sing paeans for his triumphs, and to lament for half a long life in dirges which echoed all over the world his humiliation and his fall. What king or conqueror ever before had such a monument as this poet has raised for his idol? Scarcely a single ballad of all the many Béranger has thus dedicated, which would not serve to carry the fame of its hero along through all time. And besides the Napoleon songs, if I may so call them, which the published collection contains, I have somewhere read that a great number which never yet saw the light are to be laid before the world by the guardian to whom in his lifetime the poet consigned them. Perhaps the finest of all we yet know is the glorious "Souvenirs du Peuple," one too familiar to all readers to need translation, and, indeed, too exquisitely peculiar in its simplicity to pass unharmed through any translating process. Almost equally beautiful, almost equally well-known, is "Le Cinq Mai." In both songs there is a kindred and congenial simplicity. The lips of age reverently but plainly tell, with a pathetic force wholly indescribable, their memories of the hero and his fate. Not often does Béranger wander far from his dearest theme. In the "Garret" song, we drink to the great victory which the idol has just won. The "Old Corporal" doomed to death for having resented the insult of an arrogant young officer, can die contented, but could not bear such an outrage, for he had

served the Great Man. The “Old Flag,” furled and laid in the dust, is an ever-present memorial of the time when to own it “repaid France for the blood it cost.” Of the fatal day when the meteor went out in the trenches of Waterloo, the poet will not sing—“That name shall never sadden verse of mine.” It is not the least remarkable feature in the career of Béranger, that a universality of fame has been conceded to one, many of whose songs, and the finest of them, have so peculiarly national a theme. For unquestionably the fire, the pathos, the whole poet-genius of Béranger, never reached their utmost except in the immortal songs in which he consecrated the deeds and the memory of Napoleon Buonaparte.

With the impression of these Napoleonic ballads fixed on the mind, one does not like to consider what a delusion was this poet-dream, and what a sacrifice Béranger made of his genius, as thousands had made of their blood. The poet had too much hot spontaneous feeling to be a safe politician, and was always idolizing or denouncing some one who did not deserve to be so dealt with. In the remarkable preface of 1833, he says—“I have utilized my poet’s life, and that is my consolation. A man was wanting who could speak to the people the language which they understand and which they love, and who should create for himself imitators to vary and multiply the versions of the same text. I have been that man. Liberté and la Patrie, people said, might very well have dis-

pensed with your refrains. *Liberté* and *la Patrie* are not such great ladies as some suppose: they do not disdain the co-operation of anything which is popular. It would be, it seems to me, an injustice to pass a judgment upon my songs without taking into account the influence which they have exercised. There are moments for a nation when the best music is that of the drum which beats the charge." For the sake of the poet, I prefer not to measure him by the standard he thus proposes. It is my full belief (and, if I had but time and space, I should like, as Mr. Midshipman Easy would have said, to argue the point), that a great poet seldom makes a more complete mistake than when he falls into the generous delusion of "utilizing his career." If a man has a special gift conceded to him apart from all other men, he may take it for granted that the best way he can serve the world is by developing its attributes especially. To be the faithful minister and organ of his own genius is the most truly patriotic work a poet can do. A crisis may, indeed, come when the poet may worthily use his most precious ornament, as the women of Carthage did theirs, to serve his country in her passing struggle; when, in plain words, he may make his genius the servant of his political passion. But the poet should be very sure indeed that he is on the right side, and that his object is in reality a patriotic one. A poet locked up in his garret, singing odes to abstractions, and lamentations to lost loves, while his country-

men are rushing to arms, may for the time seem rather a poor figure; but he is certainly much better employed, both for himself and for his neighbours, for the present and the future, than if, with all the force of his genius and his passion, he were urging forward his infuriated countrymen to a reckless waste of happiness and life in a hopeless struggle, and for an unworthy object.

It is some consolation to reflect that if Béranger was not a safe politician, he was unquestionably a sincere one; that if he idolized a monarch, his was the rapture of true hero-worship, not the sycophantic adulation of the court-poet. Indeed, he was little of a flatterer, and his hate burned with a flame much hotter than his love. So much bitterness and vehemence was probably never before compressed into a few light ringing couplets as may be found in some of his satirical ballads. Many of them are positively painful to read, they are so fierce, so unthinking, so full of hate. Not that he could not write easy, graceful, pleasant satire, too, with good meaning in it, keenly but not poisonously edged, such as the "Traité de Politique à l'usage de Lise." But in general he is a savage satirist, of the tomahawk-brandishing kind. When the political passions of the day have come to be almost forgotten, people will perhaps wonder, or it may be smile, at the poet's fierce exaggeration; and more, perhaps, than now will unite in the regret that a genius so essentially universal should so often have

been sacrificed to singing the praises of any idol, or denouncing the enemies of any political party.

But whatever may be thought of the results arising from the sacrifice of Béranger's genius to a political end, there can be no difference of opinion as to another sacrifice of that genius which the poet too often committed. I am no advocate of poetry with a moral eternally affixed to it. Works of art of whatever kind, like the beautiful and the sublime objects of nature, carry their moral with them in the images and thoughts with which they fill and purify and etherealize the heart. But what are we to say of the poet who degrades his heaven-conferred endowments to the expression of conceptions and language such as are the deepest degradations of common manhood? No enthusiasm of admiration for one of the sweetest singers who ever lived, no refinement of charity towards the memory of a great man dead, can excuse a critic who, on a survey of Béranger's works, hesitates to express the strongest condemnation, the most utter abhorrence and contempt, for a very large portion of them. It is a deeply painful reflection that a great proportion of Béranger's published songs is unfit to read or to hear. Two of the latest Paris editions are now before me. Probably one-fourth of the contents of each is matter which never ought to have been written or printed. And these editions are not complete. They have undergone at least some degree of purgation. One might have thought some of the

songs contained in them the most indecent ever put into type, if he did not know that earlier editions contain specimens of a still more revolting grossness. Never probably in the history of literature were such verses produced with so little of excuse for their production. Juvenal was indecent, but it was because of his too outspoken denunciations of vice. Dryden was indecent, but he lived in an age when obscenity was the common language of every day among those with whom he chiefly mixed. Massinger's noble plays are stained with many a foul expression ; but we know that much of the coarseness his published pages contain was the work of another hand ; and no one can deny that the tone of his dramas is one of a pure and exalted morality. Swift revelled in gross language, but it was often like that of the fever ward or the lunatic cell. But Béranger did not write to denounce vice like Juvenal ; he did not live in an age like Dryden's ; his works suffered no interpolation like Massinger's ; he had not a disordered mind like Swift. With the clearest and the healthiest mind, the most refined perceptions of his art, he delighted to set his genius to work at the production of the most debasing conceptions. His language had the grossness of Rabelais ; his wit too often the heartless indecency of Congreve. It is a deeply humiliating reflection that so much genius and high feeling could not keep the mind of Béranger eternally exalted at least above the lowest range of human debasement. Take physic, intellect !

The noblest fancy of its age could occupy its strength in the meanest work, and proudly exhibit the products of its degradation side by side with its highest realizations. That Béranger must in his closing years have regretted deeply the publication of productions so shameless, so unmanly, is almost certain. While we are estimating the whole character of the man, we must indeed take this belief into our consideration, and we must connect with it the observation that the proportion of his objectionable songs appears, according to the dates prefixed, to have diminished with his growing years. But the critic cannot on this account hesitate to express his judgment upon the poems as they are, which have been given to the world, and cannot be modified or withdrawn. In the preface of 1833 Béranger thus attempts a vindication of this portion of his works : “ I can conceive the reproaches which many of my songs must have drawn down upon me from austere minds, little disposed to pardon anything, even to a book which did not pretend to serve for the education of young ladies. I shall only say, if not as a defence, at least as an excuse, that these songs, the foolish inspirations of youth, have been very useful companions to grave refrains and political couplets. Without their assistance, I am tempted to believe that the latter could not well have gone either so far, so low, or even so high.” It would be a waste of words to discuss such an excuse as this. To secure the goodwill of fashion for the cause

of popular freedom, the poet does well who serves up his musical treats seasoned with a sufficiently tempting sauce of indecency. To make way for his ballads into the hearts of the people, he must now and then blaspheme with the blasphemer, and outvie the obscene in obscenity. The cause of national freedom or national glory has been served after many strange fashions, but assuredly this is the first time a patriot ever aspired to the exaltation of his race by such a process as this. The epithet of "old heathen," which was once so freely flung upon the greatest man of his age in Germany, would be far more appropriately bestowed upon the greatest poet of his age in France. There is some difference of opinion as to the morality even of Goethe's lightest verses, but there cannot possibly be any difference of opinion whatever as to the morality of a very large proportion of Béranger's songs.

Indeed, it is as an heathen poet we must look upon Béranger if we are to estimate him with anything like fairness upon his proper level. Measured by the standard of Christian morals, one must think that seldom was genius more often and more entirely perverted. The truth is, these are pagan poems. An atmosphere of thorough paganism surrounds and pervades the whole. The glory Béranger would have France pursue is the old idol who is to be won by the ever fresh sacrifice of blood. Whether the happiness of the people, with whom he really sympathized

deeply, was to be advanced by such a pursuit, appears to have concerned him very little more than it might have concerned the chief bard of Alexander the Great. He is independent in his famous garret as Diogenes was in his famous tub, and will have nothing to come between him and his sunshine, except indeed the shawl with which Lisette gracefully drapes the window. He sings of love just as Horace does, as sweetly and as lightly. Lisette might as well be Lalage or Pyrrha. When he sings of wine, one can hardly help wondering why he speaks of Champagne and not Falernian, and why he does not tell of his brows crowned with flowers, and his locks exhaling perfumed ointments. A fine world this was the poet made for himself, bright, beautiful, and evanescent as the bubbles of the wine or the laugh of Lisette,

“Dans un grenier qu'on est bien à vingt ans !”

No scruples of conscience make the pleasant Attic Nights uncomfortable, and no jealousies embitter the poet's love. His passion is of that easy kind which inspires graceful songs, but breaks no hearts. Our epicurean knows that he must die to-morrow, and therefore must snatch all the time he can for pleasure. Now that his to-morrow has become our yesterday, one is tempted to regret that the shade of Béranger cannot be found wandering about Elysian fields as bright and measureless as those of Martin's picture, with Anacreon, Catullus, and Horace for his companion

spirits, all drinking ever-renewing draughts which give no headache, and beguiled by the gay prattle of Phrynes, and Lesbias, and Lisettes, as smiling and witty as when on earth, and a good deal more faithful.

But what then becomes of Béranger the bitter, burning, political satirist—Béranger the enraptured, self-forgetting minstrel of the conqueror—Béranger the impassioned votary of the glory of France? Alcibiades at table and Alcibiades in battle were not more unlike than Béranger in one song and Béranger in another. He is fittingly represented to the mind in the little engraving on the cover of the 1856 edition, where there are two faces seen—one joyous, round and rosy, the lips bubbling, as it were, with smiles, wine and flowers all around, the other sad, stern, bitter, a dark face leaning on a haggard hand, lonely, in a prison. It is thus we must think of the author of “Roger Bontemps,” and “Le Petit Homme Gris;” of “Le Cinq Mai,” and “Le Convoi de David.”

Perhaps Béranger is most welcome in his sadness, his simple, penetrating pathos. It is his charm as a poet to have been equally a master of the joyous and the melancholy—of light mockery and of passionate energy. It is his misfortune to have been often misled into an abuse of his passion and his satire—it is his shame to have as often degraded his joyousness into buffoonery and ribaldry. Why were these con-

trasts in such a spirit? Because it was never more than human. There is a ray of pure light which we miss in the poems of this "brilliant Frenchman." Modern poetry is in no respect more distinguished from that of extinct ages than in the fact that it is suffused by the consciousness of a beauty not that of earth, for ever shining in upon our ordinary life,—a beauty which reveals itself in inanimate nature, in the love of liberty, in the human affections, in sorrows and joys, in partings, in death. It is the light which the English poet tells us "never was on sea or shore"—the rest which the German pictured "over all the mountain tops." For men such as these earth had no satisfying joy, no sleek and rosy contentment. The beauty of nature but faintly symbolized to them a beauty far more exquisite, a beauty eternal. Human love but led upwards to the thought of a state of being when affections should be purified from all earthly taint, freed from all weary details of routine existence, secured from frustration or tantalization. The noblest thoughts of Coleridge and of Wordsworth were drawn from this inspired longing. Even Byron was sometimes etherealized by such glimpses breaking in upon the chaos of a distracted spirit. Moore felt such emotions sometimes, through all his chirping, cicada-like ebullitions. Dante must have been filled with such thoughts. The German poets are deeply steeped in this sensation, some even to an unintelligible mysticism or a morbid sentimentalism. But

nothing of this kind ever disturbed Béranger. He was all *esprit*—not soul. His melancholy was touchingly human indeed, but never divine. His longings did not look upwards. Friends, freedom, wine and song would have made him a paradise anywhere. Indeed, he gives little indication even of that intense perception of the beauty and the soul of inanimate nature which is so peculiar and thrilling a chord of modern song.

The poets with whom Béranger is most usually compared are Horace, Burns, and Thomas Moore. A great many points of resemblance may be remarked between the Roman poet and our subject. The philosophy of Béranger is, as we have already observed, of a character peculiarly Horatian. But there is infinitely more warmth of feeling, more heart in the Frenchman's songs, with all his faults. They have the grace, the brightness, the amber-polish, the curious felicity, but they have a great deal more. There are songs of Béranger's which seem only fitted to be sung by a regiment about to charge; music only such as should be sounded in the blast of a trumpet. There are satirical ballads which have all the fierce bitterness of a woman's hate, mingled with the uttermost strength of a man's passion. And there is pathos of the softest kind, gentle, tender feeling, such as Mæcenas's protégé knew little of. Many of Béranger's ballads cannot possibly be read by the coldest critic without deep emotion. One may be allowed to doubt whether the warmest admirer of

Horace could honestly say that he was ever deeply touched by any of that poet's exquisitely graceful odes. Béranger was the poet of a nation—the poet of a race ; the external mouldings and ornaments which sometimes make us think we see a Horace transfigured, are little more than chance attributes, which, taken away, would have left the true poetic part almost uninjured.

The resemblance to Burns is far more real, and perhaps in all general features no better comparison can be made. Both were eminently poets of every-day nature. Both had strength, simplicity, and feeling as leading characteristics. Both were what may be termed picturesque poets, fond of producing ballads which seem like groups, fond of bringing the most idealized subject distinctly before the eyes of the reader by some homely allusion or slight descriptive touch. The materials upon which they wrought were often strikingly similar, and had each been less entirely original, the products must inevitably have borne a close resemblance. But each poet was too decidedly spontaneous and of his own kind to allow of his works bearing any family likeness to others. Two common-place popular balladists will produce you two popular songs of progress and universal brotherhood so like that you can hardly tell one from the other. But the same subject, worked on by the genius and the art of Burns and Béranger, gives you two noble, newly-born ballads, never anticipated, and

never to be imitated. Compare, for instance, "A man's a man for a' that," and that soul-stirring burst of manly anger with which Béranger declares himself "Vilain et très vilain." The same power of showering out burning, molten words, forming something too fierce to be called satire, was shared by the author of "Holy Willie's Prayer," and the author of that painful piece of savage humour, "Le Bon Dieu." But the northern had a higher nature, with all his faults, if the Frenchman was the more thorough artist. Nothing in Burns surpasses the spirit of "Le chant de Cosaque," the joyous *abandon* of "Roger Bon-temps," the simple pathos of "Le Vieux Caporal." But one must look in vain through the pages of Béranger for such a realization of pure and refining sorrow, such a retrospect upon a lost heaven of earth, as the exquisite lament for "Highland Mary."

In the fact that he is the greatest lyric poet of his nation, that he is a patriot after his own fashion, and that his leading themes were his country, his loves, and his wine, Béranger very closely resembles Thomas Moore. There is, however, an elemental dissimilarity. The simplicity which is the strength and the beauty at once by which we are most delighted in the former, is the one attribute most wanting to the latter. The melody of Moore's songs comes out with difficulty under the pressure of clogging ornaments, and the ornament is very often mere gilt and spangle. Moore has more conceits than Cowley or Suckling, more

metaphors and similes than Homer and Jean Paul Richter together. Never was a poet more thoroughly natural than Béranger. Out of the fulness of his heart his mouth speaks; and the utterance of full hearts rarely comes in metaphors and bewildering conceits. Every phase of the broad, bright, changing expanse of Béranger's nature is reflected in the flow of his song. Whether he is joyous or sad, loving or hating, he compels his hearer to rejoice or pity, love or hate, as he does, for the simple earnestness and undisguised nature of the singer find their way straight to the very heart. But Béranger knew that a great poet must do more than move hearts. The popular heart is easily moved; almost any poor juggler can sometimes succeed in doing so. Nothing is easier than to play at pathos or passion for a while, until the trick is found out by which the sword is swallowed or the onion concealed. Every year almost some new performer gathers a crowd around him. It may be Kotzebue or Eugène Sue, it may be "Claude Melnotte" or "La Traviata." The thing succeeds admirably for a while, and even long after half the passers-by have quite discovered how the performance was made up, fresh crowds still keep wondering and cheering, or, according as the nature of the exhibition may be, perhaps crying. Now, Béranger cared little for being a popular author in that sense. He knew that a great poet must, indeed, be capable of commanding the hearts of the unlettered

as well as the deeply-read ; but he must also reverse the power, and control the intellect of the scholar and the artist, as well as that of the peasant and the *gamin*. “Invent, conceive,” he has himself said, “for those who cannot read—write for those who know how to write.” This is the secret source from which the perennial fame of the poet will come. Béranger has perpetuated the perishableness of his mortal nature in the eternal marble of art. He sank the foundations of his great work deeply down in the common earth of natural humanity, and he raised its summit high up in the pure and rarefied air of intellectual refinement.

I cannot pass from the name of Thomas Moore in connexion with that of Béranger, without observing one point of peculiar resemblance. This is a certain strain of careless melancholy dashed through many even of the most joyous songs of each. One of the most exquisite peculiarities of the genius of Thomas Moore is that low, sad symphony which runs through all his songs. In the gayest moment, amid the most vivacious or exulting chorus, comes in the note of that minor key, filling the heart of the listener with an undefined melancholy, vague as that of the evening air of autumn. Something of the same peculiarity is traceable through many of the songs of Béranger. The sad strain which thus mingles with the rattling chords of these poets is not indeed like the bitter, fierce sorrow of Byron, or the sick wail of Heine ; and

it is too peculiarly upward from earth to be like the resigned and sweetening melancholy which descends upon the ballads of Uhland. But it is touching, and, such as it is, it at least is real. No man can read or hear wholly without emotion "Le Grenier," or "Doth not a meeting like this make amends?" These feelings are not too high for any of us. We can all feel thus—he must be very young or very philosophic who never has felt thus. We cannot all be expected to sympathize to the full with every note of anguish from the heart of Manfred or Faust. But here are regrets all can appreciate, and melancholy which does not come out of the gaspings of an overstrained intellect. Let us think as we may of the happiness which Béranger connected with his youth, it is impossible to be unmoved by the words in which such a man laments the decay of such a season.

It was given to Béranger to enjoy the fulness of a completed career. No bitterness of regret for promise cut short of ripeness mingled in the national lament over his grave. He had done his work before he died, and time and weather cannot destroy it. Something they may destroy which ought never to have been produced. The years which bring out the points of his true greatness into brighter relief, will probably sweep away into darkness those perishable relics of his idler hours which now are spots upon the clearness of his fame. Long after the licentious songs which Béranger scattered abroad have been utterly forgotten,

hearts will be stirred by manly enthusiasm, and eyes moistened by generous pathos, when his nobler ballads are read or sung. The true moral of his poems will be found in their power to fill the heart of humanity all over the world, and for ever, with images of beauty, and softening, elevating thoughts. The time will soon come when even critics can afford to forget the errors into which an exuberant youth sometimes betrayed his genius. We may then think of him with reverence, as one who was made the recipient of gifts such as heaven rarely gives to man, and which cannot but work in the end for human good. We may think with love of him whose heart was loving and kindly, and who has left us precious bequests which will go on bearing accumulated interest for ever : magical gems which will always have the power of conjuring up the bright spirit to illumine our hours of dulness or darkness. Béranger's place will be a high one in the world's literature. Not, indeed, in that inmost circle, upon that highest step, where the few great poets of all ages stand, may we think to place him. Not with Homer and the Greek dramatists with Shakspeare, and Dante, and Goethe. Not with the pure companionship of Milton and Schiller, could one so very human be fitly associated. But in the second company of poets few, I think, are destined to more lasting fame than Béranger. As a lyric poet he seems to have combined a greater variety of gifts than almost any other. He wrote from the most genuine nature with

the finest art. His joy and his pathos exuberate from the springs common to the poorest humanity, but we are led by them into regions which rarely before opened upon us. He imitated no one, and cannot himself be imitated. The space which he has left in literature will not indeed be filled up, but we have at least that old, old consolation which has been repeated so often that one is almost ashamed to allude to it, and which yet rises so naturally to the lips as each successive poet, painter, orator, sculptor, departs from among us. We have the consolation that nothing for which Béranger truly lived, can die with him ; that his humour is like the laughter of Homer's deities, extinguishable ; that his passionate earnestness, his sympathy, and his pathos will be living influences, quickening and reproducing for ever.





## The Poems of Freiligrath.

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**P**OETRY is not one of the progressive arts. In the course of a single generation, and that one of the earliest in a nation's history, it will often attain to a power and excellence which no future efforts may surpass ; and the accumulation of one age is so far from proving an assistance and a benefit to the next, that it rather enfeebles its successor, inducing it to place a false reliance upon resources not at its command, and acting as a stimulant to extravagance of effort only to produce poverty and perishableness of result. As a general rule, poetry may be said to be passing through three processes which everlastingly repeat themselves. First is the rough period when intellect and fancy are sufficiently awakened to strive vainly with the obstacles of undeveloped language. Then the era of triumphant genius, which makes all the materials around it flexible to its will, and of its own instinct lights upon the combinations

and the laws which insure lasting success. Then follows the age of merely imitative effort, when men strive rather to be something like that which their predecessors once were, than to rival them in new fields. Soon people find out the way of producing something which looks so like the originals bequeathed to them, as to pass current for a material combining equal excellence with the advantages of far greater ease and cheapness of manufacture. This goes on until the imitative invention has been run to utter exhaustion, until production becomes so easy that every one can produce; and then the natural effect takes place. The reaction sets in with a sudden stopping and stagnating; and at last new forces break away into a fresh path of their own, and a new era of genius begins, to be imitated, and to pass away, as before.

English poetry has passed through several of these rotations, as Greek and Latin had done until they rolled away into the past altogether. German poetry has lived long enough to go through one such process of revolution, the closing period of which is our own age. From its rough, struggling youth, it bloomed up to a sudden and splendid maturity in the era of Goethe, Schiller, Wieland, Lessing, and Herder. Poetry then seemed to become an art made invitingly easy. It was difficult, indeed, to achieve in a new direction what any one of these men had done in his own; but fatally easy to produce endless verses which

looked and sounded very like Schiller's or Goethe's, and which, considering their greater cheapness of production, might, in the eyes of many, seem quite as good as the original article. Then we have Tieck, Matthiessen, Salis, Lenau, and numbers of others. Passion is not there ; but does not sentiment supply its place ? Pathos is gone ; but maudlinism draws probably more tears, and touches its mark more easily. Deep appreciation of the human heart and manly energy of creative power have passed away ; but we have in their stead readier sources of popular sympathy,—craving, diseased self-examination and hectic egotism. At the present moment this class of poetry may be said to have had its day. German literature has reached the pause,—the quiescent or stagnant era ; and, when time enough shall have gone over to allow new forces to gather, we may look for a fresh and healthy issue in a new direction.

Where, however, there is native force of genius at all, literature does not in any era settle down into utter stagnation and inanity. Compared with the glorious days of its first prime, Germany may now, indeed, seem poor of poetic genius. But even in our own days she has had men who possessed rich and far-reaching fancy, if not the very highest range of imagination ; men whose strength, if not of the greatest, was at least their own, unborrowed from external stimulant ; whose path, if it does not pretend to scale the highest peak, has at least not been

trodden down by the feet of forerunners. I am not inclined to range Uhland among this class. Uhland belonged to the greater era which has passed away ; and, although not indeed the foremost, or even among the foremost, of that age, his genius yet gave him a distinctive place in it. But of our own age peculiarly, and having no connexion other than our own with the great Weimarian era, there are men who have produced clear, fresh, and sweet streams of song, which deserve, and must have, an unfading memory in literature. One of the most remarkable of these, in every respect, is the poet to whom I now desire to call attention.

Most of the great men who made Germany a name and a power in literature, had been laid in earth before Ferdinand Freiligrath began to write ; although his poetic career commenced at a very early age, and seems to have practically closed after a very short period of creative activity. He belongs wholly to our own age, and now, in presence at least, to our own country. He is one of the many eminent men whom collision of political opinion with established government has driven from their native land, to be swallowed up in the noise and business of London. Freiligrath was born in 1810, at Detmold, in Northern Germany ; and is not, therefore, by any means beyond the borders of the poetic years, although, so far as I know, he has not for a long time added anything substantial to his celebrity. He is one of the few men who have combined

an active commercial life with high poetic production. The main part of his career has been passed in counting-houses, in Germany, in Amsterdam, and of late in our own metropolis. He was a very young man when his poems began to create a stir in Germany ; and the generous recognition and appreciation of eminent literary friends helped to spread his reputation. Chamisso and Schwab, both celebrated in German poetry—the former, however, best known in England by his legend of *Peter Schlemyl*—were among the first to point out his rising claims. Chamisso wrote of him, in 1836, as “inferior to none in peculiarity, originality, strength, and fulness of the poetic element ;” and declared him to be one who “by the sheer force of his poetic genius compelled, unsupported by factitious aid, that attention which he merited.” Unfortunately, perhaps, for the quiet development of his powers, Freiligrath devoted his genius to political objects. The pro-Russian tendencies of the Prussian government, the retrogressive policy which began to manifest itself, the censorship of the press, and some peculiar grievances of which the people of Rhenish Prussia complained ; these and other grounds supported Freiligrath in entering upon the path of political contention. He had for some time enjoyed a pension from the Prussian king, who was rather fond of patronizing men of genius ; but he flung the gift away, published a volume of political poems which had been some time before secretly printed, became

the mark for a prosecution, and had to quit Germany. This was in 1844. For a short time he lived in Belgium and in Switzerland; but, in 1846, found a home in London. In 1848 he returned to Germany, agitated for a while, and fought bravely with dashing political poems; but was imprisoned again, brought to trial, acquitted indeed, but still a mark for such annoyance and threatened persecution, that it was not believed either useful or prudent for him to remain longer in his native country. He therefore settled in London as the manager of a banking-house, and would probably have spent his life among us, but that the altered fortunes of his country lately, I believe, have induced him to resolve on returning to it. Thus much of a brief outline may convey all that it imports the general reader to know of the career of a man whose life is yet in its prime. I desire to consider the productions, not the personality of the poet. Readers who are not acquainted with the former, will find themselves well repaid if they follow up the track which I suggest to them. Englishmen have so large and varied a current literature of their own, that general readers may be excused if their attention requires to be especially directed to some eminent foreign writers. Moreover, although many of Freiligrath's poems have been translated in stray periodicals, no collection of them has ever appeared in English. In the specimens which I select, I shall use my own version; having no convenient means of

obtaining any other, even where others exist. The poems are of three classes: the miscellaneous, the political poems, and the translations. On the second depended perhaps the most important events of the author's life, and a wide part of his present reputation; but I have no doubt that his fame, as a poet, will, when the memory of recent events has faded, entirely rest on the miscellaneous pieces. To this class, then, of the works of Freiligrath I shall almost exclusively limit myself.

The miscellaneous poems are contained in a small volume some three hundred pages in extent, less than many a prolific writer will contribute to a magazine in a twelvemonth; yet this little book exhibits as many evidences of fresh and luxuriant fancy, of vivid picture-power, of deep and sensitive impressibility by the aspects and influences of silent outward nature, and of all that can make a true poet, short of the very highest class, as any of the present day, English poet or foreign, can show. No taint of the recent weaknesses of German literature clings to it. Egotism, morbid self-exposure, exhausting subjectiveness, and effeminate bewailings—these have no place in the manly verse of Freiligrath. On the other hand, no writer I know of is more healthily free from the artistic vice of the popular English ballad of the present day, which makes poetry only a mechanical jingle of versified moral maxims, and holds itself up to be judged by the directness of its practical scraps

of wisdom. Freiligrath is thoroughly original ; sometimes, it must be owned, even to extravagance, in his peculiar love of nature. He does not, like Wordsworth, delight in the hills and streams of a plain country landscape. He does not, like Thomson, express a prim, well-regulated joy in the fair lawn and the trim grove, the sheep bathing in the stream, and the sly glimpse of an Arcadian nymph preparing to do the like. He does not, like Walter Scott, find pleasure in the grey ruin, and the moonlight streaming upon abbey arch and donjon keep ; nor, like Byron, does he love nature only because he can make her his unresisting *confidante*, and fly to her company when out of humour with every other. Freiligrath loves nature the more as her greatness swallows wholly up all thought of his own personality. The grand, the stern, the lonely, even the savage and the awful forms of nature, find the closest and the dearest place in his imagination. I have said “his imagination,” because the scenes he most delights to sing of do not live in his memory. I believe he has never seen the sun shine in its own tropic regions ; and yet these are the regions over which the fancy of the poet most lovingly hovers. The lion-land, the desert sands, the palm-tree, the jungle, the cane-swamp, the lair of the panther, the Sahara caravan—these are the objects which animate him to a full enthusiasm. His Oriental passion is the most ardent, the most unfeigned, and the most vivid in its expression, exhibited by any poet

or prose writer I know. I cannot believe he only speaks the language of poetic affectation, when he declares at the close of one of his songs—

“I linger on a northern strand,  
The North is crafty, cold, and slow;  
I would I sang in the desert sand,  
Leaning on my saddle-bow!”

It is not, indeed, a supremely difficult task to produce a professedly Eastern poem which shall have a certain imitation of Oriental luxuriance, and keep a close adherence to Oriental metaphor. We have many examples to prove that this can be done by many hands in a style far above the mere bulbul and gazelle rubbish that once was common in our annuals and small magazines. Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, Rückert's Eastern Poems, and many others, are evidences of this skill carried to a very high degree. But no one of these remarkable and celebrated productions, however some of them may excel Freiligrath's poems in other respects, can compare with his in the reality of the feeling, in the verisimilitude, in the genuine spirit and soul of the East, which belong to them. The very air of the desert or the palm-grove seems to be exhaled from some of them. It is difficult to hear of a writer adopting such subjects, singing the glories and the wonders of lands he has never seen, filling his productions with the breath of an atmosphere he has never inhaled, without suspect-

ing him of some assumed poetic eccentricity. But in none of Freiligrath's Eastern or Desert poems can one detect the slightest hint of affectation. Indeed, the few only instances where he seems to be declining into this kind of weakness, are, where he attempts something of Northern sentiment and German balladist emotion. Freiligrath writes as if he were a genuine child of the sun. The beams of the East have wakened more music in this western singer than ever they drew from the fabled harp of Memnon. Any other effort at Eastern description in poetry seems cold, pale, and sunless, when placed side by side with some of these glowing verses. Hands browned by tropic rays have laboured at descriptions which are unreal and lack-lustrious compared with some of these poems, whose author never saw a palm-tree on its own soil, or heard the roar of the lion among his own whirling sands. It is not probable that Freiligrath at present yearns for a desert-life, and a release from the routine dulness of the North, with the fervour of a younger day; or that even in that younger day the longing was quite as impassioned as the verse. But the enthusiasm was far too warm and full of force to resemble anything assumed in very wantonness. Poets do not succeed best, notwithstanding Waller's ingenious compliment, in what they do not believe. They succeed best, like all other artists and workers of whatever class, proportionately to their strength, in that on which their belief is strongest, and their feelings are

most earnest. Freiligrath's Orientalism is therefore not an affectation, but an emotion, an idiosyncrasy. It is not merely in the broad and artistically conventional features of tropic scenery that the peculiarity of his genius finds expression. Minute and picturesque details are seized with a keenness which almost suggests direct observation, and thrown in with such a skill as to give a meaning and an effect far beyond the copy-drawing which an ordinary hand might produce. We see the crocodile peering from the stream to inhale the faint air of coolness which evening brings ; we know that the distant crash through the trees tells of the elephant's unwieldy path ; we mark where the desert sand has been furrowed by the lion's shaggy tail which has just trailed across it ; we observe the burst water-skin, and the fragments of dress left on the brambles by the wayfarers of the caravan. Freiligrath is one of the most essentially picturesque poets who has lived for many years. I do not mean to claim the highest praise for a poet when I style him picturesque. Lessing settled that question long since. A poet may stand among the very highest of the highest rank, and yet furnish few direct subjects for painters ; a painter may be among the greatest of artists, and yet suggest few felicitous inspirations to a poet. But to the merit, such as it is, of being eminently suggestive of direct subjects from which a painter may copy, Freiligrath is entitled beyond any living poet of whom I know. His poems are really

all pictures, the Eastern and Desert ballads peculiarly so. No example perhaps can serve much better than the following verses from the poem entitled *Mirage*. The opening, which I omit, gracefully and fancifully shows us the harbour of Venice all decked with flags and sails ; and a gondola in which our own Othello and Desdemona are seated. Like all true German poets, Freiligrath loves Shakspeare with a fervent love. Desdemona begs of her wooer for a description of his own land, whence came the ostrich feather which droops over his brow ; and the Moor thus begins :—

“Behold, the desert’s burning sand !  
The camping-places greet thee of the tribes from whom my  
sire arose :  
Lo, in her widow’s garb, sun-branded, on thine eyes Sahara  
glows !

Who last rode through the lion-land ? The print of hoof and  
claw is here ;  
The caravan of Timbuctoo,—still on the horizon gleams the  
spear,—  
And streaming flags, and through the dust the Emir’s purple  
honour-dress,  
And the camel’s head o’ertops the throng of march with solemn  
stateliness.

Onward, in closed-up ranks, they ride where blend together sand  
and cloud ;  
Behold, the distance swallows them already in a sulphurous  
shroud :  
But thou canst follow easily the track of the departing host,  
For gleaming through the sands we find from time to time what  
they have lost !

And first, a hideous milestone ! see a dromedary lying dead,  
A bald-necked vulture pair have lighted on the fallen creature's  
head ;  
Yon costly turban, in their haste to seize their meal, they little  
heed,  
'Twas a young Arab lost it as he galloped on with reckless  
speed.

And there see fluttering scraps of housings, round the tamarisk's  
thorny bough,  
Besides a water-skin rent through, all dusty and exhausted now;  
Who's he that spurns the gaping thing with passioned curse  
and quivering lid ?  
It is the dark-haired Sheik from out the land of Biledulgerid !

He closed the rear, his horse fell down, exhausted, he was left  
behind ;  
She is his favourite wife who gasping round his waist her arms  
has twined ;  
When late he raised her on his steed, how flashed the eyes of his  
adored,  
And now he trails her through the waste as from a girdle trails  
a sword !

The torrid sand at midnight furrowed by the lion's shaggy tail  
Is swept by the expiring woman's raven tresses as they trail ;  
It gathers in her flow of hair; it scorches up her dewy lips ;  
Its flints are reddened by the blood that from her wounded ankle  
drips !

Now even the Emir fails, he reels with seething blood and fiery  
pains ;  
His eyeballs glare, and fiercely throb his forehead's azure  
gleaming veins ;  
He stoops, and with one last hot kiss the Fezzan girl to life  
recalls,  
Then, suddenly, with furious curse upon the unsheltering sand  
he falls !

But she looks slowly, wondering up, ‘Thou sleep’st, my lord,  
awake, behold!

The sky which seemed just now of brass is clothed in steel, so  
pure and cold!

Where is the Desert’s yellow glare?—a pure, bright light my  
vision cheers:

It is a glitter like the sea, whose waves are breaking round  
Algiers!

It gleams and ripples like a stream, it cools me with its freshen-  
ing smile,

It sparkles like a mighty mirror,—wake, perhaps it is the Nile!

Yet, no,—we surely travelled south,—it must be, then, the  
Senegal?

Or O, perchance it *is* the sea, whose surges yonder heave and  
fall!

No matter,—it is water,—come, see I have cast my cloak away,  
Awake, my lord, and let us hasten, and our scorching thirst  
allay:

A freshening bath, a cooling draught, new life through our poor  
limbs will send,

And yonder, where those towers rise, our pilgrimage perhaps  
will end!

I see the flaunting crimson banners over the grey portals set,  
The lances on the ramparts gleaming, lofty dome and minaret;  
I see the masts of noble vessels tossing yonder in the bay,  
I see the pilgrims thronging to bazaar and caravanserai!

My loved one, wake! The evening comes, my tongue is parching,  
let us haste.’

He raised his eyes, and hoarsely groaned, ‘It is the Mirage of  
the waste!

A juggle, worse than the Simoom, the evil demon’s mocking  
prank.’

He ceased, the vision disappeared, upon his corse the woman  
sank!”

Although Freiligrath elaborates the components of scenes and groups, so that a painter might take his pencil, transfer them one by one to canvas, and so produce a picture, it will nevertheless be perceived that he does not transgress Lessing's famous law, which assigns space to the painter, and time to the poet, as their respective domains. In other words, he does not describe objects in themselves and their own details; but only some act of motion or event which includes them, and of itself suggests their nature and appearance. Yet the pencil of Lewis was hardly more capable of reproducing the face of desert life. Fanciful, picturesque, and not without at least a gleam of pathos, is *The Traveller's Vision* :—

"It was midway in the Desert, we were camping on the ground,  
And my Bedouins lay sleeping by the unsaddled horses round;  
In the distance, towards the Nile, the moonlight fell on  
mountain cones,  
In the floating sands around us lay dead camels' bleaching  
bones.

I was sleepless; of my saddle a rude pillow I had made,  
And my knapsack, stuffed with store of drying dates, beneath  
it laid;  
With my caftan's ample folds I covered me from feet to ears,  
Near me lay my naked sabre, with my rifle and my spears.

Heavy silence,—only sometimes crackled up the sinking flame;  
Only sometimes, o'er my head, a wandering vulture croaking  
came;  
Only sometimes, in his sleep, a courser stamped upon the sand,  
Or a dreaming follower groaned, and grasped his weapon in his  
hand.

Suddenly the earth was shaken; dun and heavy shade was cast  
 O'er the moonlight; desert beasts, in wild affright, came rushing  
 past;  
 Horses plunged and reared; our guide, to grasp his flag, half  
 waking, ran,—  
 Nerveless sank his arm: he faltered, ‘Sir, the Spectre  
 caravan!’

Yes, they come! The ghastly drivers, with their camels, first  
 are seen;  
 Lolling in their lofty saddles, veil-less, graceful women lean;  
 And, beside them, wander maidens bearing pitchers, like Rebecca  
 At the fountain; riders follow; they rush by us, on to Mecca!

More, and more yet! Who can count them? Has the line no  
 ending, then?  
 Horror! even the scattered bones rise up, as camels, once  
 again!  
 Swarthy sand, that whirling swept in darkling masses through  
 the plains,  
 Is changed to shapes of swarthy men, who lead the camels by  
 the reins!

’Tis the night when all who in that sandy sea their death have  
 met,  
 And whose storm-tossed ashes cling, perhaps, around our tongues  
 even yet;  
 Whose withered skulls our horses’ hoofs perchance have trampled  
 down to-day;  
 Rise, and form a pilgrim army, at the Holy Shrine to pray!

Ever more; and now the last have scarcely passed us on the  
 track,  
 When, behold, the first already come with slackened bridles  
 back;  
 From Cape Verde to Babelmandeb’s Straits the train has swept  
 along,  
 Ere my startled horse had time to break away his halter’s thong!

Stand, and hold your plunging horses ! Each man by his saddle  
keep !

Tremble not, as at the lion tremble frightened wandering sheep !  
Let them touch you even with their long talares as they fly,  
Call on Allah ! and the spectre-train will pass you harmless by !

Wait until the morning breeze around your turban-feather  
waves,

Morning wind and morning red will give them to their desert  
graves ;

All these pilgrims of the night will turn to ashes with the day.  
See ! 'tis dawning now, my horse encouraged greets it with a  
neigh !"

The metre of these poems is so characteristic that I  
have retained it, although it is not very familiar to  
English ears.

Not merely the poetic features of Eastern and tropic  
nature delight our somewhat eccentric poet, — not  
merely the banana and the palm, the oasis, the  
Bedouin, the whirling sand-pillars, and the spectral  
pilgrims. He takes a wild joy in the ruder and the  
fiercer elements sometimes. He finds something  
worthy of poetic commemoration in the legends of  
African warfare and its attendant deeds and ceremonial  
triumphs on the banks of the Congo : he wanders by  
the kraal of the Hottentot : he listens to the squalls  
which rave and shriek around the Cape of Storms,  
and the moaning surges which toss the shivers of the  
wreck ashore on Madagascar. The roar of the lonely  
lion echoing across the waste even to Lake Mareotis  
and the tombs of the Pharaohs ; the funereal rites of

the Dschagga King, who lies dead upon his copper shield ; the flight of the tortured giraffe across the moonlit desert with the fangs of his enemy in his flesh,—these are the themes which filled the brain of this most singular of poets, in the intervals of business, snatched from counting-house occupation, in prosaic and routine-pursuing Amsterdam. Those who feel curious to read some of the wildest and fiercest specimens of this class, may turn to the *Lion's Ride*, *African Homage*, *By the Congo*, and many others which I need not name. It would be almost superfluous to say that such a fancy as this sometimes runs away with its owner into the wilds of extravagance : sometimes even precipitates him into the abyss of mere horror and hideousness. Early in his poetic career Chamisso warned him of such an imminent danger. But all Freiligrath's poems do not breathe a tropic air ; and it must be said that many of his ballads have much of softness and sweetness, many an exquisite touch of vague pathos,—gleams of deep sympathy with the very soul of nature, rare in their visitings to any one, and all unutterable to any but the true poet. Freiligrath loves the sea and its shore almost as much as he loves the East. Probably no man familiar from boyhood, as most Englishmen now are, with the sight and sound of the sea, can appreciate its wonderful and mysterious influence upon him who, reared like Freiligrath in a far inland town, comes in full youth to look upon salt waves and “the ribbed sea-sand,” for the

first time. He is peculiarly gentle and full of exquisite poetic glimpses, when he sings of the great mystic sea. He is skilful in pathos of a peculiar kind ; not deep or passionate, but gleaming in stray flashes, touching because of its unexpected tenderness, and almost always arising out of some effect produced by external nature. No man, indeed, who loves the face of the world, can avoid feeling and submitting to the unspeakable pathos of silent nature. Living nature is cheering, animating, invigorating,—inanimate nature gentle, subduing, pathetic. You cannot watch the flying clouds, or the waves upon the beach, and feel wholly joyous ; you cannot eye the leap of a trout, or follow a flight of pigeons, and be sad. Freiligrath understands this well. In his poems of the class I am now about to introduce, as in the sequence of human emotions, the interruption of anything living and moving breaks the flow of sad thought, and the mind revives into sympathetic activity. The closing lines of the gentle, delicious, dreamy *Sand Songs* will afford an instance. The reader who has to content himself with my translation must endeavour to imagine the indefinite charm of expression, the untransferable grace of language and of melody, which even far better qualified translators must fail in their effort to render.

## I.

“ I sing not of the desert-sand  
 Where savage herds in contest meet;  
 I mean the grains that on the strand  
 Are crumbling now beneath my feet.  
 For that is but a breathing curse,  
 The Desert’s restless, wandering ghost,  
 Beneath whose death-shroud man and horse,  
 Camel and driver, all are lost.  
 Cool and fresh the sea-sand lies,  
 Furrowed and wet with ocean’s brine;  
 A ready table, whither flies  
 The sea-mew’s brood on fish to dine.”

## II.

“ Inward from ocean blows the breeze,  
 The sands are tossed, the sea-weeds roll:  
 On fickle changing sands like these  
 Wild floating thoughts must fill the soul;  
 Flying before the wind and flood,  
 The whirling sands each other chase:  
 So flies and strays my restless mood,  
 And holds to no abiding place.”

## III.

“ What a mysterious region this is!  
 I understand its changes not—  
 One moment dashing ships to pieces,  
 The next a peaceful anchoring spot;  
 The wearied raven it revives,  
 And parches up the sea-worm’s tongue;  
 The gasping fish of life deprives,  
 And feeds the sea-mew’s hungry young.

Men too there are would turn away  
From such a shore with wearied air,  
While I could linger all the day  
Building ships and bridges there!"

## IV.

"A barren, thinly grass-grown steep  
Behind shuts in my landward view :  
No matter—gazing on the deep,  
My thoughts and glances back are few.

I only know here rolls the sea,  
Tossing its foam-sparks all around,  
And hill and wood and plain for me  
Are all in yonder ocean drowned !

This strip of sand, so small and brown,  
Seems now the only earthly thing :  
I wander lonely up and down  
Like an uncrowned and banished king.

I scarce can comprehend it now  
That once through inland woods I strode,  
Or lay upon the mountain's brow,  
Or over plains of heather rode.

All rest in ocean : there as well  
Repose my hopes, my longing years :  
As on the shore the surges swell,  
Thus swell upon my lids the tears!"

## V.

"Am I not like a flood whose spring  
From the far mountain forest gushes,  
Through lands and hamlets wandering,  
At last to meet the ocean rushes ?

O that I were ! in manhood's day  
Greeting the noble roar of seas,  
While in eternal youth still play  
Life's springs among the sacred trees !

## VI.

“High above me float  
Three sea-mews, dull and slow—  
I need not lift my eyes,  
I know the way they go!

For on the glowing sands  
That in the sunshine lie,  
With far outstretching wings  
Their darkening shadows fly :

A single feather falls  
Downward in the flight,  
That I of the ocean sands  
And the flying birds may write!”

One of the legends which are common to many nations has given Freiligrath a subject for a poem of singular and delicate beauty. The tale of a city magically sunk under a sea or a lake, has haunted literature since the *Arabian Nights*, and even among the prosaic Hollanders has found a holding-place. No one needs to be reminded of Thomas Moore’s exquisite ballad of *Lough Neagh*, and the “round towers of other days” shining beneath its waves. The following embodiment of the story by the poet whom I am at present illustrating, has a peculiar, gentle, undefined melancholy, enhanced to an indescribable degree by the measure of the original, which ripples slowly like the quiet waves beneath whose crystal the lost city lies enshrined.

“ I float all alone on the silent tide :  
No wavelet breaks ; it is glassy and slow :  
On the sands, in its solemn and mystic pride,  
Shines the old Sunken City below.

In the olden days of which legends tell,  
A King once banished his infant child ;  
She strayed far over the hills to dwell  
With seven dwarfs in the forest wild.

But a poison mixed by her mother’s hand,  
Soon robbed of life the poor little maid ;  
And her tiny companions, a faithful band,  
In a crystal coffin her body laid.

There in her gleaming snow-white dress,  
Crowned with flowers, the maiden lay ;  
There in unfading loveliness,  
And her mourners gazed on her all the day.

In thy crystal coffin thou liest as well,  
A bright-robed corse, O lost Julin ;  
And far through the waves’ transparent swell  
Thy palaces rise in their mystic sheen !

There rise thy towers gloomy and hoar,  
Silently telling their mournful tale ;  
There are thy walls with their arching door,  
And the stained church-windows glimmering pale.

Silent all in its mournful pride,—  
No pleasure, no sport, no hurrying feet ;  
And shoals of fishes uninjured glide  
Through deserted market and soundless street.

With vacant and glassy eyes they stare  
In through the windows and open doors ;  
On the spell-bound dwellers within they glare,  
Asleep and mute on their marble floors !

I will sink below,—I will yet renew  
The life, the splendour by spells opprest—  
I will break the death-dream of enchantment through,  
With a single breath from this living breast !

The field, the mart shall be filled with men,  
The pillared halls shed their festive gleam :  
Ye maidens, open your eyes again,  
And tell of your long and pleasant dream !

Down below ! No further he rows ;  
Lifeless and slack sink arms and feet—  
Over his head the waters close,  
He descends the Sunken City to greet !

He lives in the dwellings of days gone by,  
Lit by the crystal and amber rays ;  
Their olden glories around him lie,  
Above, the fisherman chants his lays !”

Some of Freiligrath's ballads have more distinct and living themes. A few are dedicated to a noble subject, which might well have animated the heart of a poet and an earnest lover of liberty. Living in Holland, Freiligrath could not but be aroused to feeling by the memorials around him of the gallant struggle which made the name of Dutchman heroic, despite his national and proverbial apathy, at one period of history. The noble resistance which the Hollanders made to their Spanish oppressors might well have given themes to many minstrels, although poets have not sung as many ballads in its honour as they have dedicated to subjects far less chivalrous and inspiring. Conspicuous among the events of the Dutch rebellion are the deeds of that gallant band,

the *Gueux*, whose title, first a nickname conferred in scorn, was soon hailed as a word of honour by friends, and struck as much fear to the hearts of foes as the name of Roundhead in the days of Cromwell in England, or that of *Sansculotte* in those of Dumouriez in France. Freiligrath has produced three or four picturesque and striking ballads in honour of that brave Beggar band. One is entitled *A Gueux Watch*, and is a spirited picture, purposely somewhat roughened, of a night passed in jovial preparation for a march by a body of the patriots in a hostel near Rotterdam. None of the ballads of Béranger is more vivid in its outlines and colours. We see the rough, bearded rebels sturdily drinking their patriotic toasts, and throwing up their caps at the name of William of Orange, which one of their band roars out in a song ; we hear their chorus echoed by the freezing sentry, who peeps in at the window, with his mantle round his ears to keep off the snow ; we follow them with eyes and ears, while, like genuine Dutchmen, they argue and harangue about the Cause ; we note the growl that follows Alva's hated name ; we observe the hostess and her lasses with gold-foil ornaments in their hair, moving as busily as some of Burns's gude-wives among the carousing company. A healthier, manlier ballad it would not be easy to find in any literature. Another of the Gueux ballads, *Lieve Heere*, commemorates, in a few dashing verses, a bold, self-sacrificing piece of Dutch courage (not in the popular sense of

that equivocal phrase) performed during the protracted siege by the Spaniards of Ziericksee. Somewhat of a sadder note, and indeed of a ghastlier shade, is found in *The Water Gueux*.

“The North Sea vomits high  
A corse upon the sand;  
A fisher sees it lie,  
And hurries to the strand.

The blood and brine he presses  
From the scarf around the dead;  
He opens wide the corslet,  
Lifts the beaver off the head;

The beaver with its feather,  
Its crescent and its crest;  
The sea-sand clots the motto,  
‘Rather Turk than Priest!’

Why open wide the corslet,  
And bear him high on land?  
No more shall sword or rudder  
Touch that knightly hand!

’Twas when he clutched the bulwark,  
To board the ship of Spain,  
The stroke of a seaman’s hatchet  
Cleft his wrist in twain.

He fell—the deep received him,  
With its sullen greeting roar;  
Here, with the wrist yet bleeding,  
It flings him on the shore!

High on the coast of Zealand  
The gallant corse is tossed;  
The hand a fair, sad woman  
Finds upon Friesland’s coast.

An anchor, black and rusty,  
And wet with ocean spray,  
Stands there to mark the distance  
The tide swells every day.

She leans on it and watches,  
If upon ocean gleams  
A white sail or a pennon ;  
Like marble Hope she seems.

Lo, where the hand comes floating,  
As if her own to meet ;  
The cold and rigid fingers  
Touch her very feet !

On one white finger gleaming  
A stone of ruby sheen ;  
A falcon and a lion  
Engraved thereon are seen :

\* \* \* \* \*

The dusk of evening gathers,  
I cannot see her face.

I see not if the tear-drops  
Full in her dark eyes stand ;  
But I see that from the shingle,  
She trembling lifts the hand.

The bleeding relic folding  
In her veil, along the slope  
Of the shore, she wanders homeward ;  
No more like marble Hope !”

I need hardly remark that the motto and the figures  
on the ring are of historic meaning.

Poems such as these are all the more attractive  
because they denote an amount of human interest  
not common, it must be owned, in the works.

of Freiligrath. He has given as strong proof as any man in our day could reasonably give, that he felt no indifference to the social and political concerns of this world, and of his own country in particular ; but a reader who judged of the poet's character by three-fourths of the contents of this volume, could scarcely conjecture that the author felt the slightest interest in anything which was not sea, shore, forest, or tropic desert. A poet more entirely "objective" never sang. His own identity is almost invariably kept wholly out of sight,—a rare merit among modern German poets. All his materials are without him ; are, in fact, a painter's materials. Scarcely any one of the passions or life incidents which have given the greater part of modern poetry to the world, has ever afforded him a subject. He has won his celebrity and produced his poems with scarcely any reference—certainly with none which is not brief and passing—to the emotions produced by love, hate, grief, jealousy, hope, despair, parting, or death. Where he has touched such themes, he has shown that he can give expression to manly and natural feeling in a poet's words. Two simple and touching poems occur at once to us. One is *The German Emigrants*, a quietly pathetic description of the embarkation of some poor exiles, such as in the emigrant season troop the streets of London and Liverpool, from the poet's native land for the backwoods of America. The second, *The Death of the Leader*, describes the burial far out at sea of the

venerable guide and patriarch of the emigrants, who conducted them on their raft-journey down the Neckar to the Rhine, and along the Rhine to the seaport where they embarked ; and who, upon a dim, grey, dismal day of mist, is laid with tears and prayers in his ocean bed. One or two poems have a peculiar and personal interest. Such is that which is fancifully entitled *Odysseus*, and which is a lament over the fate of the gifted and eminent Count Platen, author of the *Abbassides*, the *Grave in Bucento*, and other well known poems, who met a lonely and melancholy death by fever in Syracuse. The poem opens with a description of a Greek vessel bearing the name of the wandering hero of the *Odyssey* upon its prow, which attracts the poet's attention, and sets him musing upon the scenes and seas it has passed. He thus glides into his subject :—

“ I can make a herald of this island King,  
Yes, Odysseus, thou my greeting to a dead man’s ear shalt  
bring !  
Where Trinacria’s shores are rising brightly from the southern  
wave,  
There, not far from where the Cyclops dwelt of old, thou’lt find  
a grave !  
Flowers shed their incense round it—branches ever greenly  
cover it—  
Thou wilt find it soon, Odysseus, and thy pennants will stream  
over it !  
There—ye in the rigging hear it, sunburnt cheeks and flashing  
eyes !  
To that grave my greetings go, for there a German poet lies !

May he slumber peaceful ever in his tomb among the trees—  
 Ye, who caught his song's last breathing, be his guards,  
 Abbassides !

With the ringing of your sabres, ye, great Abbas' warrior sons,

Let the shepherds of Theocritus blend their flutes' most soothing tones !

May he slumber calmly there, to whom that early grave belongs—

Silent sleeps he in the south—the north is ringing with his songs !

Could he but know it ! Could he hear my mourning tones across the sea !

O catch them up, and bear them hence, ye flapping sails, to Sicily !

Let them murmur on the shore—in softened breath their sounds repeating—

The exile to the exile speaks, even to the dead a welcome greeting !

Swell again, and tell me when, returning with the west wind blowing,

If as an eternal wreath a laurel on that grave is growing !”

Like all true poets of modern ages, Freiligrath appreciates and loves the language and the poetry of the Bible. His works teem with allusions to the sacred writings. The *Picture Bible*; the poem composed in the cathedral at Cologne; the quaint, wild verses entitled *Leviathan*; the beautiful, picturesque, and affecting *Nebo*; and many others, illustrate the veneration and the love with which the poet clung to the associations of early Scripture training. From the last mentioned poem the following verses are selected :—

"And then to heaven were lifted  
The pious hands of age,  
To beg a speedy ending  
Of their long pilgrimage;  
And scimitars were whetted  
With bold and nervous hand,  
To fight for the green meadows  
Of the promised fatherland;

The land which seems to wait them  
Beyond, across the stream,  
A smiling, heavenly garden,  
Where plenty's blessings teem;  
In fancy oft they saw it,  
Through weary desert-sand;  
And now it lies before them,  
The milk-and-honey land!

'Canaan!' they shout exulting  
From out their vale of rest;  
By a steep path their leader  
Toils up the mountain's breast;  
Thick fall upon his shoulders  
His locks of snowy white,  
From Moses' brow are streaming  
Twin rays of golden light!

And when he reached the summit,  
By long and slow ascent,  
With eager eyes and trembling  
To gaze below he bent;  
There shone the plains where Plenty  
And Peace are ever shed,  
Which he may gaze on longing,  
Which he shall never tread!

There lay the sunny meadows,  
Where corn and vines were growing;  
There were the swarming beehives,  
The cattle for the ploughing;

There silver threads of water  
 Through emerald pastures ran,  
 The heritage of Judah,  
 From Beersheba to Dan !

‘ Yes, I have lived to see thee !  
 Now death may freely come—  
 Lord, shed Thy breath upon me,  
 And call Thy servant home !’  
 Lo, where the Lord approaches  
 On clouds all fringed with light,  
 To bear the leader upwards  
 From the pilgrim people’s sight !

To die upon a mountain,  
 O what a glorious end !  
 When clouds are tinged with purple,  
 As morning’s rays ascend ;  
 Beneath, the world’s hoarse murmur,  
 The forest, field, and stream—  
 Above, through golden portals  
 The heavenly splendours beam !”

A more ambitious effort is suggested by some fragments of what appears to have been intended for a lengthened poem, and which is the only indication Freiligrath has given of a desire to test his capacity for such an elaborate production. The fragment of which we speak is entitled *The Emigrant Poet*. Freiligrath at one time contemplated settling in the New World ; and some of his hopes and plans, under the influence of that resolution, probably gave birth to these verses. Disappointed love or ambition, or both, have driven the hero of this poem from his native Germany ; and he buries himself in the yet uncleared

forests of Canada. Some of the descriptions of winter, and of the opening of spring, are extremely vivid, and full of beauty and reality,—thus indicating that the picturesque fancy of the author did not chill or congeal when wandering under northern skies, and over northern snows :—

“ In such a workshop labour is but light,  
The forest sparkles in the morning’s glance ;  
The bushes all in diamond crust are bright,  
And every fir-tree gleams a rigid lance :  
  
The giant mountain-peaks confront the sky ;  
The quiet plains with teeming life are filled ;  
Across the river where the snow-drifts lie,  
His little house I see the beaver build :  
  
Antlers are stirring in the thickets round ;  
To lick the freshening snow the bison stoops ;  
The fawn’s light tread rings through the frozen ground,  
Above the trees the whirring heath-cock swoops.  
  
The bright-eyed lynx comes boldly from his hole ;  
Far through the firs the elk’s loud hoofs are ringing—  
I hammer at my work, while in my soul  
New songs arise,—but who will hear me singing ? ”

The poet does kindly homage to some of his brethren :—

“ At evening up the steepest heights I stray,  
Alone, save with my love and with my pain ;  
The mighty lakes below me far away,  
And there I lift full many a heartfelt strain.  
  
The dear old melodies of other days,  
Songs I have sung with friends a hundred times,  
Oft in these depths of foreign woods I raise,  
Which ne’er before have echoed German rhymes.

The peak I lay on trembled to my voice,  
 And gave it back in chorus loud and long,  
 How did the rustling forest boughs rejoice  
 To hear the notes of Ludwig Uhland's song !

The deer pricked up their antlers on the plains,  
 As far above them on the height I sang ;  
 As Kerner's, Schwab's, and Körner's glorious strains,  
 And Arndt's and Schenkendorf's, in echoes rang !

O sadly to the wanderer came the tone  
 Of home-songs here ! An Orpheus in the brakes  
 I stood—with others' music, not my own ;  
 Around me danced not stones, but forest snakes !”

The exile hunts the bison and the elk, and muses like another Jacques over a dying deer. He has loved, and he laments his lost love in verses which have much pathos, and form the nearest approach to sentiment in the whole of the volume. The end is in keeping with the sadness which prevails through the poem. We learn from the watch-fire talk of an Indian band that the poet is dead, and has been laid at his own request where his face may turn eastward, even in death, to the land he loved and was never to see more.

I must bound my *excerpta* within reasonable limits. Many other poems, such as the *Dead in the Sea*, *The Dweller in the Forest*, *The Swordcutter of Damascus*, and others, tempt me, but their claims must be resisted.

As yet, I have given scarcely anything but praise to the contents of this little volume. Many of them, however, deserve other judgment. The poet has, as

I have said already, a strong tendency towards the extravagant and the horrible ; and another inclination, scarcely less repelling to natural and simple taste, towards the fantastic. The graceful fancy displayed in *Amphitrite* and *The Flowers' Revenge*, degenerates into such poor conceits as that which closes *The Frog-Queen*. The ardent imagination of the Desert poems swells to the extravagance and horror of *Anno Domini*, and sinks into the revolting hideousness of *Scipio*. In the first of these, the poet indulges his fantasy in describing the final fate of our earth, which, according to him, is to be trailed along at the tail of some avenging comet, through unknown spaces and by nameless planet-fires, as Brunhault, in early French history, was dragged, by order of the second Clotaire, at the heels of a wild horse through the icy waters of the Marne and among the camp-fires of Chalons. In the second, a Negro tempts his South American master with a luxurious description of the exquisite enjoyment to be had by the devouring of human flesh. The latter agreeable subject Freiligrath dwells upon with an astonishing perseverance, reminding one of the determined purpose with which Swift hunts down some abomination to its very remotest lurking-place. Several instances might be found, less painful indeed than this, in which a poem opening with simple beauty is utterly marred towards the end by some inordinate piece of bizarre fancy or paltry conceit.

The best thing that could happen for Freiligrath's fame would be to have some half-dozen pieces withdrawn from all future collections of his poems. The world would soon forget them ; and the extravagances of an exuberant fancy would no longer mar the products of true feeling, taste, and genius.

It is not necessary to my present purpose to enter upon any consideration of the political ballads upon whose publication so much which was personally important to the poet turned. In all, save earnest feeling, they seem to me far inferior to his miscellaneous poems. Despite Fletcher of Saltoun and his incessantly quoted maxim, it may be reasonably doubted whether the poet's art is on the whole, at least in modern days, a very valuable political instrument. When Uhland became a member of a German council, Goethe wrote with great truth, "I fear the politician will absorb the poet. Suabia possesses men in plenty who are well informed, well intentioned, clever, and eloquent enough to be members of a council ; but she has only one poet of the stamp of Uhland." A noble engine to stir up a people to war or to resistance of oppression poetry may be, and has been occasionally, in every age from the days of Tyrtaeus to the days of Körner ; but it is a very different thing to make it the organ of strictly political opinions, and to produce leading articles in verse. The feeling which impels a poet to devote his genius to forward what he believes a great political cause deserves honour : but it is doubtful

whether any such cause has thus been greatly served, and it is tolerably certain that poems so produced have rarely secured for themselves a permanent vitality. Some men have been fashioned by nature for war poets, and some for love poets ; but we doubt whether nature ever sent out a born political poet. The fame of Freiligrath at least must depend upon those poems which had no purpose, political or patriotic, to serve. His political ballads, although just those for which he is naturally most admired by large classes of his own countrymen, seem to me among the only productions bearing his name which Time has destined for that wallet wherein he carries scraps for oblivion.

Freiligrath has been a laborious translator from English, French, Italian, and Spanish. Most poets of late years begin as translators, and we believe Freiligrath's earliest publication was his version of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. He has translated from Byron, Shelley, Coleridge,—encountering even the *Ancient Mariner*, and succeeding, save in one or two passages, with singular accuracy as well as fluency,—Burns, Campbell, Moore, Scott, Charles Lamb, Felicia Hemans, Southey, Tennyson, and others. He has displayed a wonderful facility in rendering gracefully almost the literal meaning of his authors, and a peculiar and enviable skill in mastering and reproducing their precise forms of metre.

This is not a day of great poets. No country in

the world probably has any man now living and writing whose lyric fame is destined to go on to all posterity, as that of many in the past era will, spreading and growing broader as it descends deeper down in time. It would be idle to claim any such place for Ferdinand Freiligrath. The highest honour I would assign to him is to say that, on the whole, he is not inferior in many important elements of the poetic to any contemporary; and, in some peculiar characteristics, he is superior to all. He has a vividness and a realizing power of fancy wholly his own, in which no other living writer I know of can be likened to him. He is probably the most picturesque poet of our age. I have shown that he is not possessed of well controlled and equally sustained power. Side by side with some brilliant, glowing piece of fancy, which makes the reader doubt whether nature had not gifted the poet with a range of imagination far beyond anything he has realized, comes not unfrequently some trifling piece of poor conceit far below mediocrity of thought, or far beyond the uttermost stretch which can be conceded to the fantastic and the bizarre. He is not a thinking poet. Whenever he touches, as he very rarely does, upon themes which involve deep sinking into human nature and man's relation to the universe, he falls at once into inferiority. Poetic feeling is an instinct with him, scarcely seeming to admit of help or development from his intellectual faculties. It sometimes overleaps all restraints of culture, and runs

wild upon its own strength, to collapse at last, as undisciplined powers usually must, in exhaustion and feebleness. There are, therefore, not many of these poems whose shafts have been sunk so deeply that their influence promises to be a perennially renewing power. Any readers who cannot be contented with less than the great qualities of genius which most tend to intensify and make eternal the influence of the highest poets will turn away from Freiligrath with disappointment. But they who, with less exacting demand, can derive enjoyment from a very rare combination of high and special poetic qualities, may be delighted and improved by this volume of poems. They who can appreciate a true "Picture-book without Pictures," as Hans Christian Andersen entitles one of his works, will find in the productions of Ferdinand Freiligrath a store of beautiful and wonderful groups, scenes, and visions, such as the magic mirror of no other poet of his own day can rival.





## The Bohemia of Henri Murger.

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**T**he one were to attempt to construct what Germans would call the abstract idea of a Bohemian, we might describe him as a man devoted to literature or art, and sternly opposed to the conventionalities of the world in general, and of his own particular profession. This is, indeed, the ideal Bohemian : a being absorbed in some artistic pursuit, and offering, through every detail of his daily career, practical defiance to the world's ignoble servilities and mediocrities ; calmly turning away from all the vulgar means of reaching fame, repute, or even respectability ; refusing to bend to dictation of whatever kind for any gain ; and, as a true practical philosopher, raising himself, his enjoyments, his hopes, and his ambitions into an atmosphere entirely above that of the common race of men around him. But the popular conception of a Bohemian is something very different indeed from this lofty idealization. The great majority of those to

whom the phrase conveys any meaning whatever, understand a Bohemian to be a reckless, ruined person, possessed of some flashes of genius or intellect which give little light to the world, and only lead their owner astray : a man too lazy to work, and not too proud to live on fortune and chance ; one degree above a beggar : utterly improvident and good-for-nothing ; dissipated, and perhaps profligate ; rude in manners and not over-clean in person : but all the while immensely self-conceited, taking a pride in his recklessness, his idleness, his dissipation, and his dirt. This is not an exaggeration of the common notion of a true Bohemian ; but it is perhaps, on the whole, as grotesque a caricature as the other portraits I have presented is a flattering, and indeed, glorifying exaltation. A Bohemian is simply an artist or *littérateur* who, consciously or unconsciously, secedes from conventionality in life and in art. In its essence, Bohemia is or was a protest against the subjection of human life to money-making, and of human intellect to conventional rule. To be young, to be fond of pleasure, to care nothing for worldly prosperity, to scorn mere respectability, and to rebel against rigid rule,—these are the qualities which alone may be regarded as essential to constitute the Bohemian. Conventionality and dulness are the enemies against which the Bohemian's life was supposed to be a practical protest. Accepting this as the creed, it is not difficult to conjecture the occasional tendency of its practice. As one man cannot protest against

idolatry without insisting that every place of worship must be bare as a barn ; as another cannot understand any way of checking dissipation but proscribing the waltz and enacting a Maine liquor law ; so it is likely enough that only too many Bohemians included the arrangements of debtor and creditor and the marriage bond as among the conventionalities which it became a man of spirit to reject. The respectable portion of society are rarely much scandalized by the bad habits merely of their neighbours. It is when any attempt is made to justify the habits by anything like a creed or sect, that the warmest indignation arises. No man of what is called position becomes excluded from society because he occasionally indulges in relationships which he admits to be wrong ; but he at once loses his place if he becomes a conscientious Mormon, and maintains that plurality of wives is right. Thus it has been to a great extent with the leaders of modern Bohemia and their works. The great scandal which they wrought was in acting together as a sort of social and literary sect who deliberately offered scorn to the conventionalities of the world in life and letters. The era of the recognised distinctive Bohemian is gone ; it began with Balzac, and ended with Mürger. Its reign was very brief, and its kingdom very narrow ; Paris was its cradle, its home, and its grave. It ruled over the territory which holds the Luxembourg, the Sorbonne, the Odeon, and the Boulevard Montparnasse. But by whatever name they may have been described,

every age since literature flourished has had its Bohemians. A combined protest against conventional meannesses and worldly ways will always have attraction for much of the youth and the talent of every generation. We are interested at present exclusively in the Bohemia of Balzac and of Mürger, and in its London imitation, because, such as it was, it made its mark upon the literature of the world, and has left behind it bequests and memorials which cannot hereafter be ignored by any historian who desires faithfully to describe the progress of letters and art during the earlier half of the nineteenth century.

It is well worth while, before the race shall have become a mere tradition, to endeavour to illustrate its leading characteristics, and to record a brief tribute to the peculiar qualities of some of the men who most contributed to give this class of literature the influence which, in defiance of all opposition from without, and of so many weaknesses within, it held, and must long continue to hold, over so much of the youth and the intellect of Europe. It is entitled to the consideration of the scholar, from the fact that it founded a school of literature. The Aristotelians, the Epicureans, the pre-Raphaelite artists of our own day, the *Sturm-und-Drang* school of German literature, did not form a more distinct and peculiar sect than the Bohemian authors of Paris. The Bohemia of Parisian letters found its imitators almost everywhere. We have our own London school—localized, indeed, but savouring

unmistakeably of its origin. Heavy Prussians were found to strive hard after the acquisition of the vivacious manners, the daring graces, the flippant, reckless animal spirits of the Bohemian from the left bank of the Seine. Judging from the kind of writing which, in the shape of Paris correspondence, seems still to delight the readers of Brussels, it would appear that the slang of the Bohemian is still accepted as the fitting language of literature among the subjects of King Leopold. We must not criticise the literature of Bohemia merely in its expiring spasms, or even its gathering decrepitude. Anybody who studies the best specimens of the school can understand, without explanation, what its degeneracy, its second-hand imitation, would be likely to produce. A school of art or letters is only judged at all when it is judged by its very best productions. There were unquestionably in France some men of true, although peculiar and partly wasted genius, who lent to this school its most winning attractions and its only claims to an enduring memory. Let us, therefore, single out the best specimen of the typical Bohemian, and from an analysis of his character chiefly, obtain an opportunity of appreciating that school of writers, so fascinating, so extravagant, so witty, and so soon to pass away.

Eight years ago there died in Paris, under circumstances peculiarly melancholy and painful, the last great leader, the most characteristic type, the most successful and brilliant chronicler of the Bohemian

school. Henri Mürger died at an age when the active duties of life ought to have been little more than commencing; when, at all events, genius and perseverance might well have been just beginning to gather in their rewards. The early death of poor Mürger caused little or no sensation even in the literary circles of London. To the general English public his works, and his celebrity, such as it was, were almost entirely unknown. Those who had heard anything of him regarded him and his writings for the most part as something utterly disreputable—something wholly out of the pale of social or literary consideration. Yet Mürger was a man of genius. He had to a degree entirely beyond the average of his compeers, the power of blending wit, humour, observation, and pathos: he was a perfect master in the analysing and describing of a certain phase of Parisian life, and the various lights, shadows, and forms which cross it. He wrote as he felt and as he lived. It is not to my purpose to enter into any consideration of his personal character, made up as it was of so many qualities which were generous and promising in themselves, and of so much which was improvident, reckless, and hopeless. After his death many friends came forward with literary tributes to his genius and his personal qualities, of that enthusiastic character which friendship excuses, but which cool criticism can hardly be expected to accept. On the other hand, one writer at least has given to the public a sketch of Mürger

which, even where it may have literal truth, is certainly not deserving of praise for its good-nature or generosity. Those who wish to learn what Henri Mürger appeared to his friends, cannot do better than read a little book entitled “*Histoire de Mürger pour servir à l’Histoire de la vraie Bohème*,” published by Hetzel, and which is still to be met with in every book-shop in Paris. Those who like to look at another view of the same figure, will find a piquant, amusing, ill-natured sketch of the late Bohemian in a work published a few years ago by M. Armand de Pontmartin, and called “*Les Jeudis de Madame Charbonneau*.”

There is something so peculiarly Parisian in this latter book, that I must really allow myself to wander a little out of my direct path for the purpose of approaching it. It is a prose satire upon nearly all the literary men and women of Paris, the living and the dead, whom our age deems remarkable, and who do not share the religious, political, and social views of M. Armand de Pontmartin. It is clever, witty, amusing, and indeed, in some respects, amazing. Some years ago we had a considerable commotion in the literary world of London, much altercation, mutual menacings, appeals to law, and no small amount of scandal, because a literary gentleman of moderate renown described in a weekly periodical the appearance, manners, and habits of a literary gentleman of great renown, whom he had occasionally met at a club of authors, journalists, and artists. But M.

Armand de Pontmartin treats the whole world to a most piquant satire upon the personal appearance, the conversation, the manners, the means, the private lives, the pretensions, weaknesses, failings, meannesses, vanities, and even sins, of all the literary men and women of Paris in whose drawing-rooms he had sat, and whose hands he professes to have clasped over and over again. He describes his personages, indeed, by nicknames more or less characteristic; but lest even this slender disguise might cause any of the figures to pass undetected, he furnishes towards the close of the volume a key to the whole, by introducing a list of the real names in juxtaposition with the pseudonyms. Here we can study the features and manners, as pencilled by a pitiless satirist, of a whole generation of French *littérateurs*. Here are Jules Sandeau (for whom, however, the satirist says some good words), Ernest Legouvé, Edmond About, Paulin Limayrac, Emile de Girardin, Sainte Beuve, George Sand, Théophile Gautier, Jules Janin, Victor Hugo, and Lamartine. The dead, as I have mentioned, are not spared; for behold the portraits of Balzac, Madame Emile de Girardin, Alfred de Musset, Henri Mürger. In most cases the appending of the real name becomes an entirely superfluous elucidation. Who, for instance, requires to know the true name of the literary man from whose description I extract the following lines:—"It was at this epoch that I made the acquaintance of Argyre. When I met him he had just

made his *début*, and his friends were announcing him as the direct heir of Voltaire. To commence, he had made fun out of a poetic country where he had been a guest, whose sovereign and ministers had received him with confidence, and he had repaid the hospitality of three years by a satire of three hundred pages. . . . Since then I have learned that Argyre has made his way admirably in the world: he is rich; he is decorated; he excels in the brochure; the stoutest truths have nothing to daunt him; he has spoken of the Pope like a man who is not in awe of the spiritual powers; and he has demonstrated that the original of Flandrin's finest portrait" (let me say, *en parenthèse*, Prince Napoleon) "gained the battle of the Alma and organized Algeria." The "proclivities" of the author will be well enough understood when I say that his only hero, so far as one may judge by this book, appears to be M. Louis Veuillot.

A satirist of this character was not likely to do justice, or at all events, to exhibit much generosity, towards a man of the temperament of Henri Mürger. M. de Pontmartin depicts the Bohemian in outlines which probably have literal exactness, so far as they go, but of course makes no account of the loveable and attractive qualities which must have belonged to Mürger. "In 1850," says M. de Pontmartin, "Schaunard" (it is thus he names Mürger, after one of the Bohemian's own personages) "had just published a book, in which the manners of Bohemia were painted

in colours little likely to captivate the imaginations of honest people. To judge by the author, the early career of our rising man of letters was but a perpetual hunt after crown-pieces and cutlets. It was affirmed that Schaunard had learned how to describe this kind of life by practising it. But there were, no doubt, in his book, some bright bubbles of fancy and youth ; and moreover, the public had become rather weary of grand adventures, of romances in fifty volumes, which fitted very awkwardly with the preoccupations of the Parisian world.” Then M. de Pontmartin proceeds to a very piquant sketch of poor Schaunard : his person, his taste, his extravagance, his improvidence, his debts, his dress, his miseries, and his meannesses. Nobody needs to be told what a writer at once sarcastic, matter-of-fact, and rigid, can make of a thriftless, reckless prodigal and waif of literature, when inclined to produce a satirical description. Perhaps the satirist says well, when, in concluding his description, he observes, “ You may remember, probably, the noise which was made over Schaunard’s poor coffin, and which converted a moral lesson into fanfares and applause. One might have said that Schaunard was escorted even to the cemetery by the music of the regiment which had killed him.” There is some truth in this sentence. The life of Mürger was one for pity and palliation ; his genius inspires some admiration, but much more regret ; his whole career was a failure when compared with what it might have been ; and the close of his

short existence was not fittingly followed by outbursts of extravagant panegyric and clamorous glorification.

But we have little concern with Mürger's personal character, except in so far as it reflected itself unconsciously in all his writings. He has described in his work a kind of life such as could only exist in Paris, and such as only a Frenchman could describe. "Gil Blas" is scarcely more thoroughly suffused with the atmosphere of the scenes it describes than are the principal chapters of Mürger's fantastic book. In its own way, and within its very narrow limits, the "Scènes de la Vie de Bohème" is as remarkable a life-picture as "Vanity Fair." "Balzac," says M. de Pontmartin, "was the god of all the Bohemians, who, but for him, would have had the inconvenience of being Atheists." Whatever Balzac may have been to his adorers, certainly Henri Mürger was the poet-laureate, the vates, the court historiographer of Bohemia. His works are a panorama of the fantastic country: they are all, more or less, exaggerations, sometimes caricatures; but the extravagance is not of that kind which distorts and deludes. It magnifies traits that they may be the more distinctly perceptible; it makes extravagances more extravagant, in order that their comic force may be the greater; it does not present a photograph which is literal and truthful in all its details, but a humorous and spirited sketch, true in outline if exaggerated in proportions. As some of

the drawings in *Punch*, while obvious caricatures, yet contrive to present really admirable likenesses of most of our public men ; so the Bohemian sketches of Mürger, while filled with exaggerations, present, on the whole, a picture as faithful in spirit as it is admirable in execution, of the fantastic corner of Parisian life which they profess to illustrate. A reader may possibly turn away in disgust from the kind of life which Mürger portrays : he may pronounce it contemptible, worthless, demoralizing, vulgar, if he likes ; but he cannot say that he does not understand it. It may impress him with that feeling of shame and abhorrence with which sensitive persons are sometimes filled by the perusal of " *Gil Blas*," or even of our own " *Tom Jones*" or " *Peregrine Pickle*;" but it must impress him, too, like those great works, in its own inferior degree, with a sense of reality, of power, of vitality, of truthfulness, and of nature. If the majority of Mürger's works had no better claim to general recognition than the fact that they illustrated spiritedly, and on the whole faithfully, any phase of human life and character ignored or unknown by the general world before, they would have done enough to secure themselves a place in the literary chronicles of the generation. Criticism must act upon the politician's principle, and recognise established facts. It has little to do with the means by which a new literary power comes into existence, or the merits of those who helped to found it. Enough that this

has the strength to make for itself an existence and a place; it has thus at least established an indefeasible right to critical recognition. Thus, whatever any one may think of the kind of life which Mürger described, his place as an author is established by the fact that he has described it so well. Nor will any reasonable person regard the scenes and characters of the brilliant Bohemian's books as either unworthy or uninteresting objects of study. They will enable many an outsider to understand and appreciate the very spirit of the life they illustrate—a life which has had more influence than it would be easy to appreciate upon society, literature, and even politics, in the France of our day. But Mürger had other remarkable qualities besides those of a vivid delineator of the manners of a class. He was possessed of a rare humour, a wit thoroughly Parisian, but now sadly uncommon in Parisian literature, and a pathetic power which, when it shines at all, shines with a penetrating light. When everything which can be said against the manners, the morals, the style of Mürger's writings has been said, there still must remain an acknowledgment of a rare and happy union of varied and vivid faculties—a rich stock of that true and unfading humour which Thackeray so well defines as the blending of love and wit.

The principal of Mürger's works—that, indeed, on which his reputation almost exclusively rests, the “*Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*”—opens with a preface which is in itself an admirable exposition, half

humorous, half serious, of the whole Bohemian creed, school, and practice. The author conducts us, as Dante's poetic guide leads him, at once into the midst of the strange circles we are to study. "Every man," says the author, "who enters upon the arts without any other means of existence than art itself, will be forced to pass along the paths of Bohemia. Most of our contemporaries who display now the brightest escutcheons of the artist were once Bohemians, and in their calm and prosperous glory they often recal, and perhaps not without regret, the time when, in climbing the green hill of youth, they lived upon that hazardous manna which falls from the baskets of Providence, and had no other fortune than courage, which is the virtue of the young, and hope, which is the wealth of the poor." For readers who like an axiom, Mürger sums up his general description in one brief definition: "Bohemia is that stage of the artistic life which forms the preface to the Academy, the Hôtel Dieu, or the Morgue." But, like every social state, there are shades, degrees, and classes in Bohemia; and these, for the better understanding of his "*Scènes*," Mürger endeavours to classify. First, there is that section which he names "the ignored Bohemia." This is composed of the great family of artists fatally condemned to the law of the incognito, because they can find no corner of publicity to attest their very existence in art. For them art always remains "a faith and not a calling." They had promise, many of them,

and some might have achieved performance as well, but through indolence, recklessness, timidity, or ignorance of practical life, they imagined that when the work had been finished all was done, that fame and fortune would enter their garrets *par escalade*, and that they had "only to wait until the pedestals should come to place themselves under their feet." They are for the most part "logical in their insensate heroism —they utter no cry or complaint, and they succumb passively to the obscure and rigorous destiny which they have made for themselves." "They commonly die young," adds the author in a melancholy sentence, "leaving sometimes behind them some work which the world admires more late, and which it would without doubt have applauded much sooner if it had not remained invisible." Resuming once more his description by an axiom, Mürger declares that ignored Bohemia is "not a road, but a cul de sac."

In all this, it will be seen that Mürger professes no maudlin sympathy for the self-created sufferings of a class, and for the inevitable obscurity to which even men of merit must be doomed during life, if they have not taken the obvious means to give their productions a chance of fame. He professes an entire contempt for the sentiment which has created "the ridiculous race of the unappreciated, of the lachrymose poets whose muse has always red eyes and badly combed hair." "All intellects really powerful have," says the author, "something to say, and say it, in fact, sooner

or later. Genius is the sun—all the world sees it. Talent is the diamond which may remain a long time lost in the shadow, but which always in the end is discovered by some one."

The true Bohemia, as Mürger terms it, and which he then proceeds to describe, is composed of those whom art has really called, and who have at least a chance of being also chosen. This Bohemia is indeed, like the other, surrounded by dangers; two great gulfs are on either side—misery and doubt; "but between those gulfs there is at least a road leading to a goal which the Bohemians can discern while striving to reach it." It is of the pilgrims in this Bohemia that Mürger chiefly composes the groups which make up his most remarkable work. This is, as he whimsically phrases it, the "official Bohemia," so called because those who make part of it "have signified their presence in life and in art otherwise than by a mere record in the civil registry," and have, "to borrow an expression from their own language, their names on the playbill." This is the class whose early career Mürger devoted himself to illustrate by description, by satire, by caricature, by pathos: this is the sort of life to which he gave himself up physically and intellectually—a life, as he sums it up in expressive and eloquent words, "of patience and of courage, where no one should attempt to struggle unless he be clothed with a strong cuirass of indifference, proof alike against the stupid and the envious; where no one, if he would

not stumble on the way, must quit for a single moment that self-pride which serves as a staff of support—a life charming and terrible, which has its victors and its martyrs, and into which no one should enter unless he has resigned himself beforehand to submit to the pitiless law of *Væ victis!*"

The preface thus outlined very briefly, and the general tone of which is grave, forcible, full of good sense, and at the same time deeply tinged with melancholy, serves as an introduction to one of the most eccentric, extravagant, humorous, and provoking books which even a Bohemian could give to the world. The most patient and liberal reader is often puzzled to know whether he ought to laugh or be sad, to feel admiration or anger, over the pages of this singular extravaganza. It is not reading to be recommended to every one. Many intelligent and simple minds would undoubtedly turn away offended from its pages: it would offend them, not because of that which is commonly described as "indelicacy," and which really is not to be found in its scenes, but because of its recklessness, its absence of all direct expression of moral feeling or clear recognition of moral duty. That large class of readers, abounding especially in England, who think every book objectionable and immoral which does not sum itself up into some distinct lesson of duty, and in which the author's own sympathy with morality and virtue is not constantly and clearly expressed, would not do well to open Mürger's

books at all. Starting with such canons of criticism, they could not possibly appreciate the extraordinary humour and the frequent gleams of unforced and searching pathos which shine through these "Scenes from the Life of Bohemia;" while they would utterly lose sight of the very impressive and practical moral which, after all, is inculcated in the whole work : for Mürger's heart was in the kind of life he described, even while his intellect enabled him fully to appreciate its dangers, its follies, and its meannesses. Its savage independence in the very midst of civilization ; the practical magnanimity with which obscurity, poverty, and hard struggle were endured ; the zest with which the scantiest scrap of enjoyment was seized on ; the insensate heroism (to use his own phrase) with which all thought of provision for the morrow was put aside for the amusement of to-day,—all this seems to have captivated his sympathies even where it could not control or bias his judgment. In contemplating Mürger the man, one must deplore the fatal recklessness which blighted so much of his career, and helped so powerfully to bring about its premature close. But if we regard him merely as the author of one or two characteristic and remarkable books, it would be impossible to deny that the extraordinary power, vividness, and freshness which make the "Scenes from the Life of Bohemia" a masterpiece in its way, are mainly due to the fact that the author who produced them

was in heart and spirit, as well as in social career, a very Bohemian.

The “Scenes from the Life of Bohemia” consist merely of some loosely-connected sketches from the early career of four young men of that class to which the author himself belonged. These personages are Schaunard, the great musician ; Colline, the profound philosopher ; Rodolphe, the celebrated poet ; and Marcel, the renowned painter. It must be understood that the greatness, profundity, celebrity, and renown of these remarkable persons exist, during our knowledge of them, only in their own common estimate and recognition. The world had not as yet even undertaken to look into their claims. They work, more or less regularly, for bread, and as yet receive but scant and uncertain fare in return. For instance, Marcel, the great painter, has been labouring for years upon a masterpiece, on which his fame is to rest, and which he maintains to be a grand painting of “The Passage of the Red Sea.” Every season this surprising work has been obstinately rejected by the jury of the Exhibition. In fact, by the mere force of going and coming, the picture has got to know the way so well, that the artist affirms, if he were to place it on castors it would run along to the Louvre of itself. Each time indignant at its rejection, the painter was not discouraged. Each new season he sent it in ; but in order to elude the conspiracy which a malignant body of envious judges must have formed for

the exclusion of his “Passage of the Red Sea,” he slightly modified, year after year, the details of the picture. Thus it made its appearance one season as the “Crossing of the Rubicon;” but the artist had rather hurriedly disguised Pharaoh as Cæsar, and the fraud was only too promptly detected. The following year the persevering painter put in a bank of snow, attired his Egyptians as grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, and baptized his picture “The Passage of the Beresina.” Labour in vain; even a feeling of national sympathy does not appeal to their hearts, and the jury reject the metamorphosed picture. The artist breaks into an outburst of whimsical rage; but he will not give in. “To my last sigh,” vows Marcel, “I will send them in my picture. At least it shall be engraved on their memories. I will not even wait for the season. From this day forth my picture shall become the sword of Damocles eternally suspended over their existences. I will send it round once a week to each of their houses; into the bosom of their families, into the very heart of their private lives. It shall trouble their domestic joys; it shall make their wine sour, their roast meat burnt, and their wives cross. They shall at last be all driven into madness, and every one of them will require a strait-waistcoat when he is taken to the Institute on the day of a sitting.” In this outburst, half comic, half serious, Marcel revenges himself upon his remorseless enemies, and presently forgets his vows of practical vengeance,

works away anew at his discarded picture, makes fresh struggles and shifts for life and amusement, and is on the whole extremely happy. The four Bohemians are tried rather frequently by the rebuffs which they receive from the unappreciating Dons in their several departments of art. They are miserably poor, and they are neither unhappy nor ashamed. The whole book is made up of their struggles, their wants, their brief, hardly-acquired pleasures, their hopes and disappointments, their borrowings and divers expedients, their debts, duns, balls, suppers, junketings, fasts, and sufferings. When a gleam of momentary fortune shines upon the path of any one of the four, he shares loyally with his fellows the advantages it brings. There is no such picture of poverty, struggle, and enjoyment thus blended, so far as I know, in English literature. In the very depth of their distress, these four Bohemians are positive Sybarites. They revel over a crust and a glass of wine, and their careless gaiety is actually invincible by any degree of privation. Of course their shifts and struggles are depicted with the hand of a caricaturist; but in the spirit of the story there is little of caricature. Perhaps Thackeray's Fred Bayham is the nearest approach modern English literature affords to a Bohemian of the style of Rodolphe or Schaunard; but Fred Bayham's worst privations are positive opulence when compared with the normal life of Schaunard or Rodolphe; and Bayham has his serious side and has his active interests in

politics and the real world, which make him, to a certain extent, a being of a totally different order from the extravagant, reckless, witty Bohemians. Through the whole of the volume I am now reviewing, there is not, it may be frankly stated, one single sentence, nay, one single line, betokening the slightest concern for any of the real interests of life and men, for the advancement of humanity, for the present world or the future. The four Bohemians were not politicians. The creation of the Republic of 1848 was received by them with a truly philosophical indifference. They remarked that the pavements of the Republic wore out boots quite as fast as those of the Monarchy. Nevertheless, they were not unwilling to profit by the new order of things. Therefore they prepared, with much labour, the following circular, which was addressed, in the name of each, to all their creditors :—"Citizen ! Having had the glory of dying for my country, I have charged the universal executor to arrange with you. Let us cast a veil over the past. Salvation and fraternity ! Long live the Republic !" Then, as they conceived that the right of idleness ought to have been proclaimed by the Republic in favour of arts and letters, they set themselves to looking out of window, and waited for ministerial appointments, while watching the movements of the house-porter, who had just been appointed proconsul of a Department. It would be impossible to read without a smile the fantastic chapter in which Mürger satirizes the immediate

results of the Revolution, and the manner in which its ministerial, diplomatic, and military posts were given away, fought for, bought and sold, exchanged, and gambled for ; one lucky individual selling an appointment for a *petit verre*, and a member of the Bohemian tribe winning at billiards an embassy and a meerschaum pipe together.

With all the extravagance of its mirth, this is a melancholy book. It has many chapters and episodes which are steeped in pathos. One in particular, which tells the miserable story of a poor artist and a consumptive girl, is wonderful in its way for the many new and thrilling gleams of simple and natural pathos it contrives to shed over one of the oldest and most outworn of subjects. Like Mürger's mirth, his pathos is not always drawn from the very purest source ; but in this instance at least, even the very pedantry of virtue may admit some sympathy for the sufferings of an unfortunate pair of young people, even although their union, so soon to be severed, had not been solemnized at the Madeleine or St. Généviève. But the tone of the whole book is sad even in its occasional delirium of gaiety. The struggles of the poor Bohemians are none the less painful because of the gipsy-like heedlessness with which they are borne, and the intervals of cheap revelry with which they are varied. Sometimes it is not easy to know whether one ought to admire the four companions as practical philosophers, to pity them as fools, or to be angry with

them as reprobates. Mürger seems to have been possessed towards the close of his story with a sense of the necessity of giving it something like a moral-purpose turn. His heroes reform in the end; they succeed in their several callings; they come to value their lives and their reputations: they quit the tangled footpaths of wild Bohemia, and entering upon the broad highway of life they lose the clue to the enchanted forest, and revisit it no more. But the author somehow does not seem to gladden over the redeemed respectability of his personages. There is a great deal of good sense and practical wisdom in some of the passages which conclude the volume; but the writer's heart seems to have been with the days of the pleasant folly. Two of the regenerated Bohemians talk over the past, and acknowledge that they could no longer enjoy its idleness, its heedlessness, its cheap and miserable scraps of pleasure. "I am quite content to look back upon the past," says Marcel, "but it must be over a bottle of good wine and seated in a comfortable arm-chair—*Qu'est-ce que tu veux?* I am corrupted. I no longer care for anything which is not good." And succumbing at last to the respectability and the *convenances*, the friends shake their heads, and rather dismally console themselves with the acknowledgment that *la jeunesse n'a qu'un temps*—youth has only one season. Indeed, this melancholy moral is the refrain of nearly all Mürger's works. Youth, its season and its enjoyments, seem to have been life to

him ; youth gone, the rest is spoken of as if not worth having. He loved to write of the gaieties and the follies of the one bright season ; and even when, summoning up a moment of his native clear sense, he reproves and condemns, it is with so evident a leaning to the erring side, that the reproof and condemnation have but little influence. Therefore even the set moral by which Mürger probably sought to redeem his book became rather in his tones a seduction than a warning. It is a lament that the time of enjoyment has passed, a melancholy exhortation to become wise and dull now that the capacity to appreciate folly and mirth has faded with youth. Mürger addresses wisdom and labour as Béranger, in one of his most celebrated chansons, apostrophizes the mistress of his maturity. *She* is far more beautiful, more intellectual, more true, nay, more tender, than the wild, vivacious, thoughtless, wanton Rosette of other days. All this the poet frankly and sadly acknowledges. But the early love had the one incomparable attraction—she had the poet's youth !

“ My youth—the youth I now regret.

Alas ! I cannot now love you,

As long ago I loved Rosette !”

Very much in this tone is the burthen even of Mürger's gayest chant. There is little healthy—how, indeed, could there be much ?—about either the prose or the poetry of the brilliant Bohemian. Its gaiety is wild, and much of its pathos is morbid : it is, to

apply a phrase from Alfred de Musset, "triste by nature and wanton through ennui." One may freely own that moralities not a few, as Carlyle says, may shriek out over those "Scenes of Bohemia;" but they vindicate their moral and their purpose by their truthfulness; by the force and vividness with which they illustrate certain phases of human life and certain vagaries of human character; they vindicate their artistic value by their wonderful resources of wit, by their deep though rare pathos, by their brilliant descriptive power. There is not one weak or commonplace sentence in the whole of the volume I have been describing. No Frenchman now living could produce such a book, or anything like it. The man must be dull, cold, and pedantic, indeed, who can read it without acknowledging that, through whatever moral and artistic defects and eccentricities, the blended power of genius and of human feeling is evident and impressive everywhere, even in the wildest of these wild pages.

The Bohemian days are gone; perhaps they closed with the youth and the life of Mürger. An entirely new race of *littérateurs* and students springs up, and even the Quartier Latin loses its characteristic features. "No one," says a recent writer, "would recognise in the civilized being dressed *comme tout le monde*, swaggering up and down the asphalte of the Boulevard, the reckless, eccentric student, the inhabitant of *Bohème* of Mürger." One can almost picture

the last of the race finishing up and closing that volume of existence with a parting ceremonial like that of the last of the three Gesellen in the famous German student-song. The world has probably not lost much on the whole in losing the Bohemian race. No one acknowledges more readily, more sadly than Mürger, their follies and evils. "Bohemia," he said in his closing hours to Edmond About, "is not an institution, but a malady, and I am dying of it." Yet we must not forget that there is wild youth in other cities besides Paris, and that there were fast young men before the world had ever been amused by the whimsicalities of Rodolphe and Schaunard. It is easy to accuse Mürger of having made prodigals by his Bohemian pictures, as it was to charge Schiller with having turned honest young men into robbers by the attractiveness with which he invested the character of Karl Moor. To the critic, Mürger's books are but sketches of certain phases of life; and it is not necessary, in vindicating their claims to literary merit, to vindicate also the morals of the people they describe, or even the personal character of the author. But one cannot help reflecting on the fact that, although Mürger is dead and Bohemia vanished, Parisian literature does not seem to have gained much by change of times and tastes. If the morality of Mürger was doubtful, surely that of M. Feydeau admits of no question at all. Balzac depicted some scenes which ought not to have been described; but even the deli-

rious debauch described in the *Peau de Chagrin* becomes healthful and virtuous when compared with some of the scenes in the works of living and popular French novelists. Virtuous dulness may be a nobler thing in literature than eccentric genius; but even eccentric genius is at all events much better than obscene stupidity. It seems to me that much of the literature of the Second Empire is only fit to be classified with the novels of Aphra Behn and the productions of Crébillon fils. The author of "La Nouvelle Babylone" (M. Eugène Pelletan), if he be somewhat too sweeping and severe in his impassioned denunciations of the social degradation which he maintains to have fallen upon the Paris of our day, has certainly not uttered a word too harsh in condemning the popular literature and the fashionable drama. Crébillon fils himself might have felt ashamed of the infamous novel "Fanny," which ran through eighteen or twenty editions; and even Wycherley might have disowned the parentage of many recent dramas at the performance of which the French Court "assisted." In the presence of such a condition of Parisian literature, it is but hypocrisy like that of Tartuffe, to affect any repugnance to the mere whimsicalities and extravagance of Mürger, or the grossest errors of Balzac. Even the severe censor I have just quoted, M. Pelletan, having gravely condemned the Bohemian school of romance, cannot help adding, when he compares it with present schools, "Peace to its memory after all. It was

better than its destiny." So it was. There was something about its worst phases which had generosity, spirit, independence. It did not abase itself in the dust to do Court homage, or beg for place or solicit the alms of patronage: it was often reckless but never ignoble. It had, at all events, something of the fire of genius in it—genius which (again to quote Carlyle) "never yet was wholly base or hateful." It remained for an age of order, of decorum, of prudence, and propriety, to banish from France every intellect which might have preserved and enhanced the renown of her literature, and to degrade all that it retained into Court flunkeyism and chartered licentiousness. Bohemian literature may have too often represented, in the days of Balzac or Mürger, the heedless grisette; but another school has produced a Parisian literature which is only to be typified by the licensed and registered Cyprian of the Paris streets.

Bohemia, says Mürger, is only possible in Paris. But if we have not had the genuine institution in London, we have certainly had a very pretentious native imitation. The impress of the literature of the Latin Quarter may be very easily traced upon certain books, periodicals, and authors of London. Ours, however, is a thoroughly British Bohemia, racy of the soil on which it arose. Here is a description of the region absolutely perfect in its way, from the pen of one who, if he had not been capable of something far higher, might have led our Bohemian school:—"What is

now called Bohemia," says Mr. Thackeray, "had no name in Philip's young days, though many of us knew the country very well—a pleasant land, not fenced with drab stucco like Tyburnia or Belgravia; not guarded by a huge standing army of footmen; not echoing with noble chariots; not replete with polite chintz drawing-rooms and neat tea-tables—a land over which hangs an endless fog occasioned by much tobacco; a land of chambers, billiard-rooms, supper-rooms, oysters; a land of songs; a land where soda-water flows freely in the morning; a land of tin dish-covers from taverns and frothing porter; a land of lotos-eating (with lots of Cayenne pepper); of pulls on the river; of delicious readings of novels and magazines, and saunterings in many studios; a land where men call each other by their Christian names; where most are poor; where almost all are young, and where, if a few oldsters do enter, it is because they have preserved more tenderly and carefully than other folks their youthful spirits and the delightful capacity to be idle. I have lost my way to Bohemia now; but it is certain that Prague is the most picturesque city in the world." Nowhere can there be found more faithful and vivid sketches of the British Bohemian than those which Mr. Thackeray has carelessly touched off in so many stray chapters. The author describes as one of the initiated and acclimatized alone could do. The true spirit and fragrance of the Bohemian atmosphere are about him. His Warringtons, Fred Bayhams,

Clive Newcombes, J. J. Ridleys, and the rest, are not only admirable as a general grouping, but each one is in himself a perfect type of a class or variety of the genus. Dickens has done nothing bearing any resemblance to this kind of picture. His Richard Swivellers and Micawbers are admirable comedy, but they do not belong to Bohemia. None of the air of that picturesque land has ever breathed upon them. The true Bohemia must, above all things, be a region whose inhabitants are artists and live by art. Whatever the genuine Bohemian may be, it is absolute and essential that he must never be vulgar, and that he must always at least have the sympathies of a scholar and an artist, and something of the native grace of a gentleman. Whoever would paint him must give him, under whatever circumstances, a dash of the picturesque. At his very poorest, he must resemble a Spanish gipsy rather than a Dartmoor tramp; at his very worst, he must be like a mountain brigand rather than a Seven Dials burglar.

Mr. Thackeray's powers were too great and too varied to be circumscribed by the narrow limits of the Bohemian life. But there is a school distinctly to be traced out whose literary reach does not pass those bounds. Probably not many of my readers have any distinct remembrance of a book published in London some years ago, under the name of "Friends of Bohemia." It was a satirical novel, partly social, partly political, but in the former aspect professing to deal

with the section of London life which corresponds with the Parisian sphere illustrated by Mürger. The book was, when considered as a novel, a total failure. It wanted almost everything which is essential to successful fiction. The author had not the art of telling a story, and was quite unable to awaken in any reader the slightest gleam of interest regarding the mere evolution of the narrative. The characters of the romance had no life about them, and they all talked in newspaper paragraphs. Yet scarcely any reader could have failed to recognise the great talent which the author had wasted in an uncongenial effort. The satirical style was so penetrating and at the same time so simple, the observations were so quaintly original, the very scepticism and irreverence had so little of the old, common-place sneer about them, that it was impossible not to acknowledge in every page the presence of a vigorous and a peculiar intellect. The author was Mr. Edward M. Whitty, a man of bright and precocious talents, who, after a short career, full of brief promise, in London journalism and letters, suddenly quitted the field in broken health and went out to Australia, there to die. Before the publication of the "Friends of Bohemia," Mr. Whitty had been well known as a political satirist of a new and remarkable character. He had contributed to a London weekly periodical, to a Liverpool newspaper, and to other publications, continued essays and sketches descriptive of the House of Commons, its great men, its little men, its life,

and its peculiarities. There was about these sketches a power which removed them altogether out of the insignificant order of the common-place parliamentary gossip. As the *Athenæum* truly remarked, in noticing Mr. Whitty's death, they lifted that species of writing to the rank of a literature. Thoroughly original and even odd in their tone, pungent in their cynical style, there was an amount of shrewd observation, and keen, comprehensive judgment about them, which gave them a solid value. Mr. Whitty was scarcely ever at fault in his estimate of the capacity and even the general character of a public man. Written many years ago, those sketches are, for the most part, well worth reading now. It is curious to observe how, in almost all instances, the men whose rise they predicted have risen, those whom they pronounced to be doomed to extinction have been extinguished. But this turn of mind and style of writing utterly marred the author's success as a novelist. He endeavoured to make the Bohemian a politician : he endeavoured to produce a kind of work which should combine Mürger with "Vivian Grey." Even if such a task could be accomplished, he was not the man to achieve it. Therefore "Friends of Bohemia" made less mark than its author was capable of making, and the author himself accomplished far less than his natural power might have enabled him to effect. I have devoted these few lines to his memory, chiefly because his unsuccessful novel was the only attempt I know of to

give to English literature a work ostentatiously and professedly Bohemian.

Our London school is led by no great author ; by none even who pretends to the possession of genius. Yet its existence and its influence must be felt in almost all circles of readers. Even those who have never analysed their observations on the subject must be dimly conscious of the presence of a certain new element in our literature—a certain dashing, flippant, “fast” style of description and of reflection, all savouring purely of London—irreverent, swaggering, not without wit, and sometimes not even without wisdom, but in all cases fantastic, impudent, and cockneyfied. In books, in periodicals, in newspapers, the style may be traced by the least observant of readers. This is the style of the London Bohemian, this the thought and language of the school which produces fast novels and writes sensation articles, and has raised to a positive profession the manufacture of the theatrical burlesque. It is altogether rougher, broader, more of the black and white style than its Parisian prototype. It wants the ebullient, inexhaustible, and penetrative wit of Mürger : it wants, too, that nameless grace which he threw over all his productions : it wants his rare blending of the pathetic and the droll. Regarding every subject, scene, and character from a London point of view, concerning himself with no human interests whatever outside the limits of a very small London circle ; viewing, or affecting to view, all life as a prodigious joke and

mummery, the London Bohemian swaggers through literature more roysteringly and more noisily than his *confrère* of Paris ; but he does not make the same mark as he passes, and his day will leave but few records behind which any posterity will care to gather up. There is, however, one point of indisputable superiority—our British school affects no moral eccentricities. It needs no excuse such as the best of the Paris band must require. The men who produce its vivacious, dashing literature are, so far as works may indicate character, not merely accomplished scholars, but men of honour and principle. Their worst defects are faults of taste and style ; and even these, although they may sometimes make sober readers impatient, may be borne with good-nature and composure when we reflect how very, very soon the whole school is likely to pass away.

Even already there are quickly spreading indications that the public have had nearly enough of the fast novel of London life—the dashing article on London haunts, the wearily droll burlesque in which the classic and the Cockney are blended in fantastic *olla podrida*. For, after all, there really is a world outside Fleet-street, and there are people who do not write fast articles and haunt the coulisses of theatres ; and we cannot always listen to the sayings of one set of individuals. It is not to be made an accusation against a class of authors that they only describe what they know. But the author who can only describe one phase of life must expect, unless he possesses very

wonderful powers, to find his listeners soon grow weary. A man of genius may no doubt make for himself a perpetual place of some kind in literature, no matter how narrow the field to which he limits his labour ; but when a disciple appears who attempts to do very much the same sort of thing with far inferior powers, and in a still narrower field ; and when various minor imitators follow more and more feebly in the footsteps of the second, the public very soon grows impatient of the operation, and before long thrusts aside the whole band, or passes by them with indifference. The whole of the fast school of London *littérateurs* have made themselves up after the model of Mr. Dickens or of Mr. Thackeray, and by that very fact alone, if they secured for themselves a temporary success, they likewise insured an ultimate failure. One consideration, however, must be borne in mind : we have seen what fashion of literature it is which has succeeded the Bohemian fraternity of Paris, and we have seen how very little art or morals have gained by the change ; we have yet to see what the effects will be upon British letters when our minor authors cease to imitate Dickens and Thackeray. Will it be much of a gain to literature, if to the school of the Real and the Humorous succeeds the school of the Unreal and the Sensational ?\*

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\* It should be stated that this was written before the reign of the Sensational had fully set in, and when its coming into power was as yet only a possibility.

Yet, whatever may be the immediate result, it is well to have frequent revolutions, and even rebellions, in the dynasties of letters. A leader there is very soon captain long enough. The literature of France was sinking into a very grandiose and pompous condition of decrepitude when the battle of classicists and romanticists came to infuse life into it ; and the contest of these rival schools was degenerating itself into pedantry or extravagance, when the wild Bohemians suddenly diverted the public attention to realisms of an entirely novel kind. Inundated as we have been for some time with realistic novels and dramas, we are apt to forget that the common tendency of literature runs in quite another direction. Unless it is at frequent intervals drawn down to the ordinary paths of human life, our art is a great deal too fond of endeavouring to strike its head against the sublime stars. Idealization is on the whole very easily attained, and it affords to commonplace minds the tempting and delightful opportunity of enacting inspiration with very little trouble. Poets and romancists too are often much disposed to give themselves such airs as historians were wont to do when they pleased to consider certain topics as beneath their notice, and invented what Macaulay justly calls “that vile phrase, the dignity of history.” Now, the Bohemian *littérateurs* did for France, in their own way, something like the service which Fielding and Smollett did for England, which Dickens and Thackeray found it needful in our own

days to do again. “Tom Jones” has its greatest value in the fact that it bequeaths to all time a perfect picture, a very photograph, of an ordinary, good-humoured, clever, dashing young fellow of that day—just the kind of person with whom nobody is too good to acknowledge himself kin, and nobody too bad to be allowed to claim at least a distant relationship. Something of a similar nature, softened in fact because of the change of morals, and still further softened by the author to suit the change in manners, is Mr. Thackeray’s “Pendennis.” Here is the ordinary young man of the collegiate class, in the reign of Victoria ; here are his ways, his pleasures, his good and bad qualities, his very impulses and feelings, so faithfully mirrored that any future age has but to look in and learn the secrets of a past generation. Let us do the Bohemians the justice to acknowledge that they have rendered, in their own sphere, a somewhat similar service to literature, and even to history. The dignity of romance would scorn to degrade itself by noticing the pitiful lives, the vulgar, cheap enjoyments, the ignoble follies of the Schaunards, and Rodolphes, and Oliviers. It would have turned away from them as the fine ladies and gentlemen turned away from Molière’s homely pictures of good-natured *bourgeois*, and simple, commonplace girls. Yet the true history of our times could not have afforded to lose a page or two devoted to the Bohemians and their literature. They have had the peculiar fortune to write their story for

themselves. We must not judge too harshly these epicureans of poverty—these hungry Anacreons of the Latin Quarter. They had the advantage over modern Anacreons of a very different kind, that they were at least truthful and real : they did not sing or speak, like Thomas Moore, of bowers of roses and brimming bowls, of Lesbias and Chloes, and affect the manners as well as the morals of Horace, in the drawing-rooms and boudoirs of the nineteenth century : they did not, on the other hand, like a popular French school, revel in distorted sentimentalities, in fantastic flights of mock passion, in the vagaries of disorder trying to excuse itself by shamming a lofty *morale* of its own making. Where they rebelled, they rebelled against sycophancy and mean proprieties and conventionalities in art and in life ; and when they ran into extravagance they knew themselves extravagant, and never affected to think themselves any better. They lived and wrote merely, indeed, to give to the world a few scenes from the daily life of struggling, joyous, heedless youth—a youth which, if it made war upon any of the world's laws, was at least good-humoured and genial, not scowling, sullen, and misanthropical in its antagonism. The literary man, the artist, must have been singularly prudent and fortunate in his early career who can say that none of the Bohemian literature speaks to him of many a personal memory ; and singularly sage and unsympathetic who can declare that its spirit is wholly unknown to him. I

have already said that I cannot recommend the society which men like Mürger painted as the best company for sensible and practical, or sensitive and prudish, persons to take up with. Even the best of the Bohemians, British or foreign, talk in language terribly reckless as regards the conventionalities and proprieties of life. These roysterer writers require stout nerves in those who would appreciate them and do justice to them through all their swagger and headlong spirits. Béranger pleaded, in defence of some of his chansons, and the plea was in itself not unreasonable, that they were never written for the instruction of young ladies. None of the Bohemians I know of can be supposed to have intended his books for the classes of a feminine academy. They are very realistic, all of them : they take the world, or rather just that section of society which makes up their world, exactly as they find it. If they meet young men who are wild, reckless, prodigal, fond of pleasure, careless of worldly advancement, ready to run into debt, and indifferent as to the means of getting out of it, they describe them as endowed with precisely those qualities, and they take no trouble to apologize to the world for the ways of the personages thus presented to public notice. It would be a weary and a futile undertaking to enter here upon a consideration of the question, how far the mere existence of certain phases of society justifies an author in describing them. Pedantry of all kind apart, it may well be acknowledged that there

are limits to realism, and that all the habits of all the classes of London and Paris are not fitting subjects for the descriptive hand of the novelist. But, as a rule, the modern Bohemians cannot be charged with any serious infringement of the limits which good taste and common sense would prescribe. As a mere school, theirs may be considered a failure. The respectabilities of life are far too strong for them and their literature. No one keeps up such a struggle very long ; the weak cannot do it, and the really strong seldom care to waste their strength in a prolonged and losing battle. In the real world, the school of Major Pendennis always regains the upper hand, and generous eccentricity has to give in at last. In the world of literature, too, the proprieties are finally triumphant after every episode of interruption. Mürger's Bohemians, in their ultimate absorption into the calm and steady progress of society around, very aptly typify the fate of the fitful literature which they helped to make popular ; but the world has every reason to be thankful for such occasional interruptions to the current of its literary fashion. Art and letters may be very well described as despotisms tempered by frequent insurrection. The classicists become intolerable in their pompous monotony, and are for a while, to the great relief of society, pushed aside by the romanticists. When these have harped too long upon the string of wild human passion, stormy vices, and melancholy fate, comes very appropriately into existence the band which

deals only with the petty vices and trumpery difficulties and wayward ephemeral emotions of youth and poverty. And the Bohemians have their brief day, until they too pass away. Society gains something by each successive revolution. The leaders of each are niched among the chiefs of literature ; their relics become part of our possessions, and the rest are swept away, and very soon forgotten. It seems to me that the Bohemian literature has made sufficient mark upon its age to be entitled to some permanent place, however modest, in literary history. However great the follies and faults of the man and of his style, I should regret to think that the French, and even the English readers of the future, will not retain some distinct appreciation of the wit, the geniality, the vividness, the pathos, the exuberant spirits and good-nature of the typical Bohemian of Paris, Henri Mürger.





## Victor Hugo.

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VICTOR HUGO is, undoubtedly, the most prominent representative of French literature now living. He has attempted success in a great many directions, and has achieved it, to a certain degree, in all ; he has found readers, admirers, and imitators among all classes, and in all countries, where books of any kind are read. While endowed beyond question with gifts which raise him far above the level of the merely popular French authors of recent days, the Dumas and the Sues, or even those of less objectionable character, Victor Hugo has produced the most universally read romance of his age. He is the author of a number of dramas once so successful that they all but founded a new school of literature in France. He is without a rival in his own country as a lyrist, of a certain refined and intellectual class—not a popular singer like Béranger, or Burns, whose verses may be read with delight in the study, and chorused

with rapture in the garret and the peasant's cottage, but a balladist of rich and luxuriant fancy, exuberant imagery, tender feeling, and peculiarly graceful expression. When the poet turned politician, he became one of the most eloquent of the orators whose genius revived for a brief period the memories of the old Girondist days ; and, when driven into exile, he turned and smote his enemy with a bitterness and a power which no Girondist possessed. He is in every way the most remarkable of the many gifted and accomplished men of kindred views, the Lamartines, Louis Blancs, and Rollins, whom political causes have banished from France.

Victor Hugo represents a theory and a school of art. That theory deserves consideration the more especially because of the fidelity with which, through his whole career, its author has adhered to it. The ardent young Legitimist has changed into the vehement Republican ; the hymns of hyperbolical loyalty to monarchy have been succeeded by passionate denunciations of kings. From the condition of mind during which he denounced popular liberty and even the people in fierce and unmeasured invective, he gradually expanded into a lover of romantic and picturesque patriotism ; and sang the struggles of Greece, and the daring exploits of Kanaris, in strains which a Greek of to-day might read with mingled feelings of pride and humiliation. Thus growing in liberalism of views, Victor Hugo at last developed into an ardent

and passionate lover, and even devotee, of the people and popular liberty. Nay, as he was originally an unreasoning enthusiast in his attachment to royalty, so he has in his later years become the very fanatic of liberty. From the Legitimist hymns of his early years to the "Châtimens" and "The Day of Kings" is, indeed, a long journey for even a French politician and poet to traverse. But if Victor Hugo has changed so completely his political views, he has remained during the same period thoroughly faithful to his theory and creed of art. For he has, during the whole of his long, full, and active literary life, worked in obedience to a distinct theory. Without reference to that actuating faith his works cannot be fairly judged at all. An English author writes, so to speak, in a haphazard fashion. He has a turn for the romantic, and he allows his taste to carry him whither it will. He has a genius for humorous descriptions of external objects and peculiarities, and he abandons every other consideration for the development of this speciality alone. He has a natural power which no one around him possesses of delineating the characters of ordinary men and women, and he accordingly produces books which are perfect mirrors or photographs of human life. But all these things are done in obedience to the author's instincts, and not to any dogmas of art which he has chosen to set up. Our English author concerns himself not the least about any theories of art at all. He lets the reins fall upon his horse's neck

and journeys whither his bearer will carry him. I am not certain that this is not the best and truest theory of all. If genius be worth anything it is worth trusting. But this is certainly not the principle upon which French writers of distinction have commonly worked ; and Victor Hugo in especial is the representative of an artistic principle for which in his younger days he fiercely fought, and to which in his elder years he is as earnestly, although more calmly, devoted. His theory itself lives and flourishes in his own person still. He maintained it in "The Last Days of a Condemned ;" in the immortal "Hunchback of Notre Dame ;" in that marvellous freak and folly of splendid genius, "The Legend of the Ages," the great literary ruin of its day. He maintained it as earnestly and practically as ever in the long-expected, widely-heralded, extraordinary "Misérables."

Victor Hugo's life in great measure explains his literary principles. Of that life its earliest years were the most remarkable, and the most surcharged with varied experiences. Even the incidents of banishment must have been slight events in the life of the man of fifty, who before the age of twelve had been hurried over half Europe amid the roar of cannon, and almost amid the crush of ranks. The poet's father was General Hugo, an officer of eminence, and the author of some military works of repute. Of his father many of the son's best verses speak in feeling tones, and a touchingly told incident in

the *Legende des Siècles* is a tribute of the poet to a humanity and bravery surpassing in this instance the famous action of Sir Philip Sidney. General Hugo was one of the first volunteers of the Republic. His wife was a Vendean by birth, and of true Vendean sentiment. Her son says of her, in a preface to one of his volumes, that "when a poor girl of fifteen years, in flight across the Bocage, she was a *brigande*, like Madame de Bonchamp and Madame Larochejaquelein." This early difference of parental sentiment influenced deeply the changes of the young poet's career. In his youth he naturally imbibed his mother's principles. "I almost loved La Vendée," he says himself, "before France." At the date of his birth, his father was a colonel in the army of Napoleon, and the child and the mother followed the soldier's steps from Besançon, Victor Hugo's birth-place, to Elba, thence to Paris, from Paris to Rome, from Rome to Naples. In his poem, "My Childhood," the poet describes his range over Europe, and observes that he had run half over the world almost before he had begun to live. He resided several years in Naples, where his father was governor of Avelino. In 1809 his mother returned to France, bringing with her the young poet and two of his brothers. She conducted herself the education of her sons within the walls of a convent, until 1811, when the family were removed to Spain, where General Hugo then held high office in the palace of Joseph

Buonaparte, who had been called to the barren and short-lived pomp of King of Spain and of the Indies.

Spanish life and scenery deeply affected and animated the young lyrist. Victor Hugo's susceptible and impressionable temperament was precisely one to absorb the full benefit of the changes of scene and climate through which he passed at so early an age. French authors are rarely of cosmopolitan character. It is their peculiarity in general to be nothing but French. Telemachus, Achilles, the Cid, Orestes, nay, even Genghis Khan, Mahomet, the Orphan of China, and the Wandering Jew come out of the fatal Galli-cizing process thorough Parisians. French classic authors have invented, without boasting of or even claiming it, a fourth unity to add to the three they so pitilessly maintained—the unity of character, which reduces universal humanity to one mould or type whose die was made in Paris. But Victor Hugo is unlike most of his country's poets in this respect. He has somewhat at least, in the Carlylean phrase, "swallowed formulas." Sometimes he seems an Italian under the influences of an Italian sky. Sometimes his song glows up with the spirit of Old Castile. Sometimes, though but rarely, national individuality is thoroughly laid aside, and he belongs to the whole world. But his residence in Spain, although short in duration, seems to have left the deepest impress on his mind. His most graceful allusions, his brightest descriptions, are Spanish. Perhaps the very best poem

in the “Legend of the Ages” is the exquisite and suggestive “Rose of the Infanta.” The very type and mould of all his poems, he declares himself, is to be found in the old Spanish town, which a few vivid lines in one of his prefaces describe.

“Why,” he asks, “should not this book resemble one of the beautiful old cities of Spain, with the cool orange-walk along the river, the large squares open to the sun for public festivals; the narrow, tortuous, sometimes obscure streets, where stand crowded together houses of all shapes, of all ages, high, low, black, white, sculptured, painted; labyrinths of buildings ranged confusedly: palaces, hospitals, convents, barracks, all diverse, all bearing their destination written in their architecture; markets full of people and of noise; cemeteries where the living remain hushed as the dead; there the theatre with its tinsel and its music, yonder the old standing gibbet, with its mouldering stone, its rusting iron, its skeleton creaking in the wind; in the centre the great Gothic cathedral, imposing in its vastness, marvellous in its details, beautiful at two leagues’ distance, and beautiful at two paces; and then at the other end of the town, the Oriental mosque, hidden in its sycamores and palms.”

In 1822 appeared the first volume of “Odes and Ballads.” With this issue, the young author may be said to have claimed and received his place among the foremost of his country’s living poets. The spirit of

these poems is one of the intensest loyalty—loyalty which the old advocates of divine right might have smiled on with approval. All the maternal devotion to the old kingly family flows up in every page; indeed kings in general come in for no small share of the poet's veneration, just as at a later day all rulers are viewed by him with something of the same feeling which centres itself into a focus upon one monarch. Victor Hugo was no great admirer of the people when he published this volume. In a poem addressed "To the Kings of Europe," he likens the position of monarchs of later days to that of condemned captives in Rome, who on the eve of their execution, according to ancient usage, were treated to a splendid banquet at the doors of their prisons. Thus, he exclaims—

"Like such a feast, O Kings, your days are passing by,  
The cup of splendour, envied by the vulgar eye,  
    Your banquet-board adorning,  
While mingling with the sounds of mirth and music's swell,  
Your ears already catch the tiger-people's yell,  
    Impatient for the morning!"

"Light," he declares, in a poem to Liberty, "are the sceptres and chains of Asiatic and African monarchs! Happy the peoples who live under them, for at least they have not our boasted liberty!"

Those who read over the author's loyal ballads without any inordinate feeling of sympathy with the objects of his exuberant veneration, will probably think there is very much of the college prize poem in most

of them. With all their fervour of loyalty there does not seem much heart in them ; indeed the loyalty itself seems more a matter of taste than of feeling. The young poet under the impress of maternal influence probably thought it rather a chivalric and poetic sort of thing to be passionately loyal, and to intone his verses to the strain of "Oh, Richard, oh, mon Roi." They have but little of the earnestness and sternness with which at a later date the poet expressed such very different sentiments. In truth, Victor Hugo was not made to warble adulation. His was a genius especially of the antagonistic kind. Denunciation even cannot be very vigorous which has only an abstract popular liberty for its object. The eloquence of invective in these poems is a very different thing from that which the author flung into *Les Châtimens* and *Napoléon le Petit*. The second volume of "Odes and Ballads," published in 1826, shows a considerable cooling of the political fervour, and a proportionate glow of the poetic warmth. It is not, however, in either of these volumes, that his true lyrist faculty seems to me to have displayed itself.

It is not necessary to enumerate in their order of publication the volumes upon which Victor Hugo's fame as a ballad-poet rests—*Les Orientales*, *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, *Les Chants du Crépuscule*, and others. France and the world received them as the utterances of one who, whatever his defects, was a true

poet. Indeed, many who read these lyrics must often feel tempted to regret that Victor Hugo ever set up for a great dramatic regenerator, for the founder of a new school of vast philosophical epic. We are all familiar with the story told in various forms and languages of the man who spent half a lifetime in traversing the earth to seek out a treasure which a dream had told him of, and which all the while was lying hidden in the soil at his own cottage door. Something to this purpose may be said of Victor Hugo. What need had he to labour at long historical dramas, to lose himself in the labyrinth of inscrutable *épopées*, he who had such a precious store of literary gold and jewels within his easy reach ? What a variety is in these little scraps of minstrelsy ! What an inexhaustible fancy, ranging so widely over nature and life, and only too often venturing with its exuberance into the bizarre regions beyond the limits of reality and humanity. What vivid, varied colours ; what graceful outlines ; what pictures are here ! What prodigal imagery ; what flowers gathered in every region where flowers grow brightest and wildest ; what a blending of the warmth and luxuriance of the South with the grey and melancholy shades of the North. Gentle, tender human feeling animates, softens, and often saddens them. The *Orientales* especially abound in pretty, touching picture-poems, such as "Lazzara," or this "Farewell of the Arab Hostess :"

" Since nothing in our land can keep thee now,  
 Our golden maize, our palm-tree's shading bough,  
     Our plenty or repose ;  
 Nor even to know that at thy voice and glance,  
 Our maidens' hearts beat quicker in the dance,  
     When noon no longer glows :

Adieu, white stranger ! I with mine own hands  
 Have saddled, lest he throw thee on the sands,  
     Thy fiery-tempered horse ;  
 His firm feet paw the earth, his neck bends free,  
 His flanks shine like a rock the surging sea  
     Has polished in its course.

Hadst thou but wished it, haply one of these  
 Our sisters would have served thee on her knees,  
     Beneath our sheltering eaves.  
 And joyed to sing thee softly into sleep,  
 And from thy face the busy flies to keep,  
     With fan of plantain leaves.

But thou wilt onwards, lonely night and day,  
 Thy horse's hoof along the rocky way  
     A stream of fire-dust flings.  
 In deepest shade thy spear will glimmer bright,  
 And on its point the demons of the night  
     Will blindly tear their wings.

If, wearied, thou shouldst once more seek this track,  
 Yon mountain, rising like the camel's back,  
     O, seek my faithful tent !  
 Its beehive roof far off will greet thy sight,  
 Its single doorway looking to the light,  
     The way the swallow went.

But O, remember, shouldst thou come no more,  
 The desert daughters, who upon the shore  
     Have danced and sung for thee ;  
 O, fair young stranger, think, when thou art gone,  
 Sometimes on them ; perchance in more than one  
     Shall live thy memory."

In Victor Hugo's early ballads may be found the germ of all that bloomed out into such a wonder-flower of late growth as *The Legend of the Ages*. Not only the beauty, the fancy, the imagery, the pathos, but the extravagance, the grotesqueness, the absurdity, the horror may be found foreshadowed there. Even certain specialities of metaphor, certain peculiar phrases, may be traced through the ballads into the legends. In that poem with the fearful subject and the marvellous picture-power, the theme of which is the destruction of Sodom, an especial resemblance can be discovered in general character, if not in precise expression, to some passages of *The Legend of the Ages*. The scenes across which the destroying cloud sweeps in its progress to vengeance, are described in a few strophes, which set a whole picture before the eyes. The plain on which Babel—drear, vast, and ruined—stands, sublime in its desolation and its moral, is a scene which does not easily fade from the memory. The burning of the doomed cities ; the sulphur flame leaping from point to point, from tower to tower ; the walls shining like the scales of a lizard in the glare ; the tumbling temples, where in the insufferable glow

“The idol of shame  
Withers in flame,  
Writhing his arms of brass ;”

All this makes up a picture which reminds one in the vastness of its spaces and the minuteness of its details,

of Doré's fantastic forms and contrasts of light and gloom.

The mature career of Victor Hugo mainly embodies two distinct struggles, one against imperial domination, the other against literary rule. Into both battles the poet threw an almost unequalled degree of energy, of earnestness, and of genius. The literary contest began with the publication of his dramatic works. It was an especially fierce debate. The very warmest literary or artistic struggles in England, at least of late days, are of a singularly tepid and inanimate character when compared with the vehement battle of classicists and romanticists. No excitement greater than a newspaper controversy, or a discussion echoed from languid criticism in more languid drawing-rooms, ever attends the production of a poem or a play in England. A few journals and a few knots of people ask each other at one time is pre-Raphaelitism true art; at another, is Mr. Swinburne's *Dolores* nice reading; at another, again, is the theatrical sensation of the house on fire as good as that of the header into the water. But Victor Hugo's *Ernani* was performed amid uproar and hand-to-hand encounters in the Théâtre Français. *Marion de Lorme* was suppressed by the censorship, and only acted when a change of dynasty produced more favourable circumstances. Even royal aid was implored to put down by the strong hand the daring rebel against literary rule. Charles the Tenth wisely, however,

declined to interfere where he had no more control than King Canute possessed over the innovating waves. The production of *Ernani* brought the thing to a climax. The votaries of the rival schools used to besiege the theatre doors from early morning—the one set determined that, if they could prevent it, the masterpiece of the rebellious school should never be played at all; the others ready to risk limb and even life to win a new triumph for their hero and leader. The Latin Quarter, of course, turned out for Hugo, and romance, and rebellion. Some of those who fought most fiercely for the new cause and the young dramatist have become renowned in literature since; and some have found fame in war; and some have accepted exile; and some have conformed to the new conditions, and are senators, and ministers, and court functionaries. On the night of the first representation I believe it was, that a little army of young literary men, headed by Théophile Gautier and others now equally distinguished, succeeded in gaining admission to the theatre hours and hours before the time for the performance. They had come provided for the occasion; they brought their dinners—easily brought for that matter—with them; they dined, and sang wild choruses, and delivered speeches—and the regular audience bursting in at last found half the house occupied by this daring and devoted crew. *Ernani* triumphed, not without wild disturbance and even rioting—and the romantic had it all its own way

for a while. Perhaps, when it had got the field all clear, it made less of the situation than might have been expected. As a protest against pedantic adherence to old forms it succeeded, and it left two or three masterpieces behind it, of which *Ernani* is one.

But Victor Hugo's struggle has been, so far as regards the object to which he directed it, a failure. No new poetic dynasty has been established. Corneille and Racine still live, and *Cromwell* and *Angelo* are gone. Or if the classics have been supplanted on the French stage, they are supplanted for the most part by pieces which would only have provoked the just scorn and disgust of the author of *Ernani*. Time came when it was not convenient to play the latter piece in Paris, and then set in the stagnant and fetid age of the French drama, when nudity or immorality alone were allowed to fill houses and create sensations. That even Imperial Paris can appreciate a great drama still was proved last summer during the short season when the revived *Ernani* was allowed to run. Amid all the excitements of the Exhibition and the visits of emperors, kings, and sultans, the Parisian heart and brain found a source of almost supreme delight and pride in the performance of a play that was new seven-and-thirty years ago. Not only was every box, and stall, and seat, and pigeonhole of whatever kind, hired and competed for at enormous prices long beforehand; not alone was all the splendour, fashion, literature, and art of Paris magnificently

represented at the opening performance, but the street in which are the principal entrances to the Théâtre Français was occupied all through the evening by a dense crowd eager to hear at the close of every act how the representation had succeeded. Of course in all this there was something of political significance. But it is a cheering sign that the drama and the taste for the drama are not wholly debauched in France, when so much excitement and delight could be once more created by the representation of a great play.

The preface to the drama of *Cromwell*, a long, elaborate, and very able essay, expounds the doctrine which the poet professedly made the guide of his career. This essay, taken as a work in itself, will be readily admitted to have much truth and force in it, many eloquent passages exhibiting a genuine appreciation of the best objects of art, many vigorous and unanswerable exposures of the follies of French pedantic criticism, and some ingenious theories which readers who care to speculate on such subjects may study with interest. But it does not fully declare the views which the poet expressed in other publications, and obviously laboured to develope in his works. The preface to *Cromwell* might be taken merely to amount to a vindication of that blending of the grotesque and the tragic which has given to literature some of its noblest productions, and which we in England describe in our expressive and untranslatable phrase as humour. But no one ever denied that

the grotesque forms a proper subject of the poet's art, and that the painful, the appalling, and even the horrible belong to its domain. Neither in theory, nor according to precedent, could such a question ever be raised. In what literature, even including that of France, was not the principle always recognised ? What really great poem or drama ever was produced which had not a blending of such elements ? What great artist ever did or could consent to forego their use ? But Victor Hugo practically maintained, and even in distinct terms asserted, that the repulsive, the hideous, the loathsome are proper as central objects of art : indeed, that whatever can be found anywhere existing in nature, whatever the wildest strain of fantasy can conceive, the poet or painter may choose as his subject. The question for the critic is not, Victor Hugo declares, what subject the poet has chosen, but how he has executed his work. Whatever exists in nature or fancy is within the province of art to reproduce. Nature and human life have moral and physical horrors, distortions, abortions, uglinesses ; therefore, all these things are unquestionable objects of art. The only question is, whether the poet or painter has drawn faithful likenesses. If hideousness be faithfully reproduced, agonies of torture correctly delineated, monstrous crime carefully anatomized, the artist has realized the object of his art. In plain words, art, according to Victor Hugo, has not and ought not to have limitation of any kind. It was to

realize this theory that Victor Hugo produced the dramas which were for a time so overwhelmingly successful. He won one or two sudden and splendid victories. But it is not in such a case the first step which costs. The field was won by surprise in the first instance, but the difficulty was to keep it. Victor Hugo failed in keeping it. The success which for a while was won by *Cromwell* and *Ernani*, faded in *Marie Tudor* and *Angelo*, and was extinguished altogether amid the hisses which greeted *Les Burgraves*; although in that gloomy drama there are far more frequent evidences of genius than in many of its temporarily triumphant predecessors.

Victor Hugo, however, remained still a faithful adherent to the poetic doctrine on which his dramas were founded, and continued to give it expression in more or less fanciful and extravagant illustrations. Most fanciful, most extravagant, and in some respects most brilliant of all, is the *Legend of the Ages*. After years of vehement political struggle by pen and tongue—after long exile, the fruit of so much new and varied experience came forth in this most remarkable poem. The conception of the *Legend of the Ages* is one unparalleled in our day for its vastness and grandeur. To present the whole history of man's career on earth in a series of poetical *tableaux* comprised within the limits of any possible printing and reading, was surely an attempt which nothing but the very audacity of genius could have originated.

No achievement could be anything but a failure when viewed in comparison with such a task. The two goodly volumes originally issued were, the poet informed us, but a commencement. Not, however, he adds, a fragment. A peristyle is in itself an edifice—a tree is but a portion of a forest, but yet it has perfect life and unity in itself. “To paint humanity successively and simultaneously under all its aspects, history, fable, philosophy, science, religion, which sum themselves up in one single and immense movement of ascension towards the light; to show in a mirror at once sombre and clear that grand form, one and multiple, gloomy and radiant, fatal and consecrated, Man”—such, Victor Hugo tells us, has been the object of the *Legend of the Ages*. “The poems, diverse in subject but inspired by the same thought, have no other link between them than a thread, that thread which sometimes attenuates to the point of being invisible but which never breaks, the great mysterious thread of the human labyrinth, Progress.” These Legends, he adds in a vivid piece of metaphor, “pass from hand to hand the torch of human tradition.”

The epochs of history illustrated by this poem are—From Eve to the founder of Christianity; the Decay of Rome; Islam; the Heroic Age of Christianity; the Knights Errant; the Thrones of the East; Italy; the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries; Now; and then a prophetic Twentieth Age, and a

paulo-post future entitled “Hors du Temps.” Each of these epochs is symbolized by a tableau containing one or several pictures of some form or scene which taken successively may serve to exhibit the broad characteristics of an age. One is deterred from beginning to point out unaccountable gaps in the narrative by the fear that once having started upon such a course of criticism it would become impossible to fix a limit at which to stop. It is useless to ask why Greece, whose historical position was entirely unlike that of Rome, has no representative group or even figure; why Egypt has no beam of poetic light thrown on its vastness and its mysteries; why the era of maritime discovery is almost wholly unnoticed. The peculiarity of the poem is that it is wrought out by a kind of adaptation of the laws of painting or sculpture. If a sculptor were to produce a series of figures—Eve in Paradise; Christ healing the sick; Androcles and the Lion in the Roman amphitheatre; Mahomet; Roland and his brother Paladins; Sultan Murad, &c., and to entitle his labours an illustration of the epochs of human history, such a series of figures, executed with proportionate skill, might well be declared a splendid conception and quite a sufficient realization of the sculptor’s idea. No one could hesitate to concede that the effect of such a design must mainly depend upon the broad isolation of the groups; that the very nature of sculpture would forbid the presentation of more than a few striking

forms to lift the mind from point to point of history ; and that to crowd figure upon figure would only disturb and confuse, instead of deepening and sustaining the impression. But one cannot help expecting something more than a mere succession of pictorial or statuesque effects from a work which claims to be a great philosophic *épopée*, a solution of history, legend, and moral truth in the alembic of poetry. We do not demand that it shall equal its subject, but we must ask that it shall not misrepresent it. We expect that the glass in which Banquo shows us the forms of many kings, although it cannot give us their full proportions and bodily presentment, shall give us their true outlines at least, and that, although it may be a diminishing, it shall not be a distorting mirror.

Still I am not inclined, for the reasons already indicated, to dwell much upon this point. Let imperfections of this nature be ignored altogether. Let it be assumed that all which we denominate classic history is effectively represented by a short piece of poetic moralizing on the legend of Androcles and the Lion, that the "Song of the Sea Rovers" typifies in the happiest manner the great age of maritime discovery, that the dawn of science upon the earth needed no illustration at all. A few of Victor Hugo's rapid pen strokes would easily fill up those gaps, and even when they had been filled up, new chasms would reveal themselves to the eye. From the very nature of the undertaking it never could satisfy even the

most moderate demands as to completeness. I therefore rather invite attention to the poems just as they are, and ask for judgment of the work upon the characteristics which they themselves present: pronounce upon the peristyle, to accept the poet's own illustration, simply as a peristyle, and judge of the tree merely as a solitary tree.

The poems are opened, as with a solemn overture, by a magnificent specimen of the poet's picturesque style, in a description, fresh and glowing, of the early earthly paradise, when "life was all adoration," when

"The star was without pride, and the worm without envy!"  
when

"Nothing was little, although all was infant ;"

and when

"Space trembled, like a new-born child."

It is a conspicuous feature of Victor Hugo's poetic character that he delights in the beauties and the glories of external nature. French poets have not frequently evinced such a perception. In no literature, except perhaps our own in the *Chloe* and *Strephon* days, are there to be found so many epithets and descriptions addressed to nature, which plainly indicate that the poet had no real sympathy with or reverence for nature, and that he never indeed had opened his eyes to look at nature herself, but had been quietly content to accept images at second hand, fading and diluting through the lines of his poetic predecessors.

Trees, precipices, flowers, waterfalls are all described by some conventional and lifeless epithet, introduced because these objects had to be described in some way, and the poet had no description of his own to give. Quite unlike all this is Victor Hugo, who nowhere shows the true poet's capacity more than in the happy art of revealing an entire picture in a few inexpressibly felicitous and suggestive lines. But it must be owned that this passage, which opens with all but sublimity, degenerates towards its close into very rhapsody. The poet's ecstasies upon the maternity of Eve are thoroughly French, and are neither elevating nor affecting. A little bad taste and extravagance prevented this poem from being one of the finest pieces of descriptive declamation in modern verse.

Still a higher power, a power raising the mind to the very verge of the sublime, is exhibited in the second poem, which bears the name of "Conscience." Cain, after his crime, has fled with his family into the unknown plains. He is haunted by the presence of an eye, ever steadfastly fixed upon him, in sun and shadow, in light and darkness. In vain he wanders on for thirty days and thirty nights, restless, sleepless, not daring to look up. Still, from the heights of the heavens the same eye is fixed sternly on him. "Hide me!" he cries, in shuddering agony; and his sons make a tent of skins to cover him. In vain. They build a wall of bronze to screen him. In vain—still the eye gazes on him. They raise a city of granite,

the shadow of whose turrets makes night over the plains, and in the centre one giant tower. Cain enters, pale and haggard. The fair-haired Zilla asks, trembling, whether the eye has disappeared, and Cain answers in despair, "No; it is always there." Then Cain declares that nothing but the very bosom of earth itself can hide him, and that he will live down beneath its surface in depths where nothing can see him or be seen by him. And they hollow out for him a cavern, deep down in the earth, into which the outcast descends. And when they had covered the subterranean abyss, and closed it over his head, behold—

"The eye was in the vault, and still was fixed on Cain!"

No bare description can convey any idea of the singular, the almost appalling power, with which the presence of this motionless, eternal, visible Conscience haunts the fratricide. The effect is all the greater because of the simplicity of the language. Victor Hugo shows his true strength in this short poem. Could he have sustained the whole work with anything of a proportionate power, his place among living poets would be without an equal.

Some of the finest and some of the most extravagant of the poems illustrate the days of chivalry. What sensation but that of the ludicrous is conveyed by the perusal in modern French rhyme of the lengthy history, spun out as elaborately as a description of a pugilistic encounter in a sporting journal, of the

duel between Roland and Oliver, which lasted five days and five nights on an island in the Rhone? On the other hand, the "Little King of Galicia," with much extravagance, is nevertheless full of a certain chivalrous and manly spirit, which well redeems its errors. There is a singularly suggestive force in one quiet line of this poem. Certain treacherous and cruel princes have plotted the destruction of the poor boy-king of Galicia. He is brought by them a captive to the depths of a forest, where they debate among themselves what is to be done with him. Suddenly a solitary knight rides along the forest-path close to which they, with their followers, are resting. The intruder boldly asks them what they are planning, and who is their young prisoner. Disdaining any subterfuge, they frankly inform him of their object, and, pointing to their numbers, assure the knight that instant death awaits him if he interferes but for a moment with them; he may, if he will, ride quietly on his way, but another minute's delay is death. The unknown warrior, as his sole reply, calmly raises his vizor, and

"I am called Roland, peer of France, he said."

There is something singularly noble in the naïve dignity of this reply. What need of further words? Enough to name the name of "Roland, peer of France," to show that treason and cruelty had met with an unsparing and inexorable foe. Need it be

said that Roland, even against such odds, rescues the poor *petit Roi*, and crushes the conspirators? Indeed, it is but justice to say that throughout the whole of these legends, with all their whimsicality and extravagance, there runs a vein of noble sympathy with oppressed weakness, and hearty admiration for chivalric self-devotion, which win back the reader, even when almost exhausted, to an interest in the work and a respect for the author.

“Eviradnus” is, to some extent, of the same mould; a fine picture of a gallant old knight, devoted and disinterested, much such a man as Don Quixote might have been had he only lived at the proper time. The description of an old legend-haunted tower in “Eviradnus” is gloomily impressive. But it has the fatal blemish which so often mars Victor Hugo’s finest conceptions; it is so exhaustively elaborated that it fairly wearies out even the most sympathetic and admiring reader. Hugo has one prevailing defect, perhaps the greatest defect of a merely artistic kind which a poet can have,—he does not know when or where to stop. Take, for example, the description in this “Eviradnus” poem, of the grim old hall, with its double row of mounted, empty armour-suits, where the young heiress of the title is to perform her dreary inaugural vigil. At first the mind fully enters into the sombre picture of desolation and ruin, wrought so effectively with a vague blending of legendary and supernatural awe;

with the association of past crimes and death, and the suggestion of spectral terrors. Ranged along either side of the stern old hall are the suits of armour once filled by the giants and the heroes of the race, now fixed in the saddles, empty and ghost-like. The hall is so vast that in looking upwards towards the confused beams and joists of the ceiling, the gazer almost expects to see the stars. The giant spider floats in his web among the fantastic griffins and dragons and sphinxes which are sculptured on the cornices and beams. Terror seems crouching in every corner. Night appears to hold its breath ; the very air is as if dead ; the gate seems afraid to move its clang ing wings. A few touches like these suffice to set a whole picture, and a very grim one, before the mind. But the poet determines to intensify by concentration the general impression ; and therefore proceeds to dilate upon the ghastly ranks of empty armour. He revels in a *mélange* of the real and the supernatural ; he views his subject in every direction, exhaustingly drags forth into light every grotesque or hideous suggestion which the theme could possibly offer, until the reader, fairly tired of being trailed along through so many labyrinthine extravagances, ceases at last to feel any emotion whatever but genuine weariness and dulness. Every appalling sensation has left him long ago. Nay, when he now turns back to the earlier passages which seemed at first so terribly impressive, he finds he can no longer recal, that he can scarcely comprehend, the

emotions which formerly affected him. He has supped full of horrors, and, satiated with the repulsive repast, cannot recal even a sensation of the appetite with which he commenced the "bitter business." The property-man who gets up and arranges the green-scaled demons and fiery imps for *Der Freischütz*, might as reasonably be expected to thrill with terror at the tinsel and phosphorus he has put together, as the reader who has patiently followed Victor Hugo through one of these exhausting descriptions to retain one gleam of awe, or indeed of any vivid emotion whatever in his mind. A positively amusing instance of this "damnable iteration" is given in one of the cheerful legends which celebrate the "Thrones of the East." The reader receives with a thrill of vague awe and solemn emotion the accents in which the first sphinx pours into the ears of the crime-wearied and fated sultan his ominous story of despair and death. But what sense could endure ten such tales, one after the other, all to precisely the same moral, having precisely the same climax, and told in language but slightly differing? We admit a sense of horror at the doom of Queen Nitocris. The corresponding fate of Teglath-Phalassar somewhat diminishes the emotion. The ultimate punishment of Nimrod is less moving still: Chrem's demise is listened to with calmness; Cambyses' with downright indifference; Belus' with positive contempt; and before he has nearly got through the list of ruined royalties,

the yawning reader is heartily sick of the subject altogether, and could not be roused into emotion by the fate of a whole Egyptian dynasty. The anger of Zim-Zizimi is to be accounted for without any reference to the personal reflections which he supposed to be cast upon himself. Who could endure ten long stories all about the same thing in unbroken succession? Scheherezade's life would soon have been brought to a termination had she persisted in telling her sultan the same thing over again for ten nights in dreary continuity.

What a hideous and fearful picture is that of "The Day of Kings!" Who can help being reminded that its author is likewise the author of the bitter gibings of *Les Châtiments* and the savage invectives of *Napoléon le Petit*? With what repulsive delight he who once sang pæans to kingly power revels here in parables of the cruelties and crimes of kings. Better, surely, the extravagance of loyalty, than such extravagance of denunciation. Better, at least to the artist, that which fills the heart with feelings of devotion even to a wrong political cause, than that which gives birth to such wild groupings of horror and hideousness. To the many just causes of complaint which Victor Hugo has put forward against the present system of government in France, might be added by Victor Hugo's admirers that it has filled the poet's heart with a hatred towards a certain class of rulers which embitters and darkens the current of his song.

“The Thrones of the East” is full of objects which surely, if art is to have any limitations at all, are beyond its domain. There is much more to be said in defence of the hideous paintings of martyr-agonies in some of the galleries of Italy and Spain. For in the latter, be their repulsiveness what it may, there is art of some sort. The writhings of the victim are at least painted with a hideous skill : the wounds make the spectator shudder as if they were genuine gashes. But what art is there in a bare, ghastly enumeration of the barbarities of an Eastern sultan : in a list of disembowelled men and strangled women ? A paragraph from the most exaggerated newspaper description of the worst scenes of the Cawnpore massacre put into rhyme would exhibit quite as much of poetic power. The very purposes of horror which those passages of the poem were intended to serve, fail utterly. The reader is pained, shocked, revolted at the first few lines ; but he has not gone far before inevitable weariness triumphs. Victor Hugo in some instances does not even essay any description of the horrors to which he devotes page after page of enumeration. There is nothing even to keep the mind strained to the vulgar horror pitch. What on earth did the poet want with such incidents at all ? Where they are bare enumerations, they are at best useless ; where the descriptive power is put forth, no words can condemn them too strongly. Is this the issue of the theory about nature and real life ? Is this the kind

of thing which is to supplant Racine and Corneille? Is this an illustration of the poet's appreciation of Shakspeare? If this style of production be, as its author claims for it to be, truth and life, then we can only say with Pisistratus Caxton, "Hurrah for falsehood and death by all means."

There are, however, gleams shining everywhere through the poem which relieve the darkness of mysticism, and soften the glare of horror. The figure of the child "Isora" for instance has a winning attractiveness which induces the reader to persevere through the monotonous gloom of "Rathbert." "The Rose of the Infanta" is an exquisite picture, and a marvellously artistic piece of work. Vague depths of thought are stirred up by the wonderfully, although so quietly, contrasted forms of the royal child playing with her flower at the margin of the basin, and the silent, sombre, brooding king, the king of the Inquisition, the king of the Armada, in whose inmost soul the sudden breeze which already curls and ripples the crisping surface of the water awakens indefinite boding for the vast fleet which he has sent to sea.

" Meanwhile, in silence, on the basin's edge  
The Infanta, blue-eyed angel, holds her rose  
Gravely, and kisses it from time to time:  
Sudden a breath of air, one of the gusts  
The shuddering evening sends across the plains,  
Troubles the water, makes the reeds to sigh,  
Sweeps through the myrtle groves and asphodel,  
And passing where the tranquil Infant stands,

With one light rapid pinion as it flies  
Dashes her flower abruptly in the pool ;  
And in her startled hand leaves but a stem.  
Behold, the basin seems an angry lake ;  
So clear a moment since, it now is black ;  
It has its billows—'tis a boiling sea ;  
All the poor rose is scattered on its waves ;  
Its hundred leaves the water flings about,  
Whirling and wrecking scatter everywhere  
On myriad tiny waves the breeze has roused,  
And seem a fleet that founders in a gulf.  
'Madame,' said the duenna, with a brow  
Of gloom, to the amazed and dreaming child,  
'Princes rule all on earth, except the wind !'

A quietly pathetic episode is that entitled "Les Pauvres Gens;" the story of a poor fisherwife whose husband is at sea in a night of storm; of her visit to the hut of a poor widow who had been sick, and whom she finds dead; and of the charity with which she burthens herself with the two little infants left by the dead woman in addition to her own numerous and half-fed tribe of younglings. Thoroughly natural and affecting are the sensations of doubt and almost of fear with which she waits her husband's return, not feeling quite certain how he may view her "improvident magnanimity." The reader too feels relieved when the honest tender heart of the rough fisherman reveals itself in such homely words of quiet trustiness and charity. What a picture of simple benevolence, of unpretending, almost unconscious self-sacrifice, Victor Hugo has painted here! What a noble unlettered faith!

"Quand il verra qu'il faut nourrir avec les nôtres  
Cette petite fille et ce petit garçon,  
Le bon Dieu nous fera prendre plus de poisson."

It is something marvellous how an author who could draw such life-scenes which must move every heart, ever was induced to desert the domain of nature and of feeling. What is there in Goldsmith, in Crabbe, in Wordsworth, more filled with simple beauty and quiet tenderness than this little poem ?

If Victor Hugo has shown, even in the *Legend of the Ages*, that he can be simple, clear, healthful, he has also shown that he preferred to be obscure, unintelligible, morbid. Where he could have been pathetic, he chose rather to be horrifying. Where he could have been sublime, he delighted to be extravagant and grotesque. It is no vindication of a work, three-fourths of which are either entirely incomprehensible or entirely horrible, to say that there are scattered through it a few simple and beautiful poems which prove that the author could be when he chose a genuine poet. I cannot pronounce judgment upon the great philosophical and moral purpose which admirers discern in the *Legend of the Ages*, for the plain reason that I am not able to discover it. It is quite true that this is as yet only an unfinished work, but I am unable to see how any supplementary volumes can brighten the obscure passages, or redeem the repulsive characteristics of those already published.

I am compelled to believe that the *Legend of the*

*Ages* is a failure ; nay more, that the literary history of our era commemorates no such instance of wasted genius. Whether it is ever continued or not matters little to the world. The poet who at twenty despaired of living for further labour, spoke complacently, when nearly forty years older, of finishing the vast work of which the volumes I have been describing are but the peristyle. It seems to me that the chief value of the portion now completed (if these two volumes can be called complete) will be that it may, perhaps, give the *coup de grâce* to that kind of art which Victor Hugo lent his life and his genius to establish. How could any one argue, upon any ordinary principles, with the upholders of such a school ? How debate with a disputant who regards your very effort to vindicate even the elementary and unalterable principles of art as the proof of your entire unfitness to appreciate art at all ? How else than by pointing to the fate of labours like these, which demanded and exhibited so much earnestness, patience, and genius, and which not even earnestness, patience, and genius could save from unconditional failure ? The *Legend of the Ages* is almost such a wreck as the Babel which the poet himself described—huge, audacious, fantastic, monstrous, useless, serving nothing, adorning nothing. The attempt was indeed one of vast conception, but that is a questionable honour which attaches to having attempted something preposterously beyond our strength, and failed accordingly. Besides, although the very

subject of itself insured a certain kind of failure, yet there are other causes of failure in the work which are Victor Hugo's own. He might in any case have failed to produce adequate illustrations within any reasonable compass of some of the epochs he selected to celebrate. He must have failed in producing a satisfactory whole. But he might have given to the world noble and beautiful images, exalted thoughts, cheering and elevating associations. He might have done that which none other has done for his country's literature—bequeathed to her a noble poem, combined of genius and of freedom. What has he given to the world in this his most ambitious poem? A succession of fantastic, ghastly, or hideous groups and scenes, illumined indeed here and there by some ray of pure feeling, relieved at very rare intervals by some form of quiet human dignity and beauty, but on the whole leaving an impression which the mind gladly seeks to efface of fantasies as chimerical as they are monstrous, visions as absurd as they are revolting. The volumes, like Rathbert's presence-chamber in the "Italian Age," are filled with

"Une odeur de tuerie et de cadavres frais."

The mind struggles to shake off the whole poem like a nightmare. It seems a treason to that which was once called the "joyous science" to turn poetic genius of so high an order to so low a purpose. The thinking part of the world would justly grow impatient of

the poet's calling altogether if poets generally were to adopt the theories and follow the example of Victor Hugo's later years. It surely is not hypercriticism or a pedantic enforcing of capricious rules to declare that the natural object of the poet is not to darken and to lower, but to brighten and to elevate ; and that the pathetic or the terrible are but acceptable as agents by which to purify, to exalt, and thus in the end to rejoice. I emphatically object to that extravagance of liberty which allows the poetic spirit, like the lady in the Arabian tale, to abandon its own pure, bright, and joyous home to revel in charnel and lazarus-houses and the company of ghouls.

Even devotees of Victor Hugo were a good deal alarmed by the *Legend of the Ages*, and looked forward with dread to the promised continuation of it. A profound sense of relief was felt when after a while it became known that the author was at work, not at the conclusion of the great philosophical *épopée*, but at a novel of human and common life. We were all delighted to find that the author of the immortal "Hunchback" had left his mysticisms and his prophecies and his Eastern monstrosities to come to the lives and sufferings of men and women. Long before the opening volumes of *Les Misérables* were published, the world was looking out for it with eager expectation, and something like a determination to admire it. No work published in our day received anything like the same amount of anticipatory notice ; no work had such raptures of prelimi-

nary adulation poured over it ; no work was run after, clamoured for, fought for with such frenetic eagerness. According to all rational expectation the cool English reader who opened a book thus trumpeted and thus expected, ought to have risen from its perusal profoundly disappointed. How can we more entirely acknowledge the great power of the *Misérables* than by stating that after having observed for weeks and weeks the daily proclamations and preludings of the coming of the great book, we all read it through at last without the slightest sense of disappointment ? Not that we admired it all, approved of it all, or read its principal passages always with pleasure ; but that there was an irresistible power, a terrible reality about the book, which, with whatever sensations they might impress the reader, did not admit of any feeling so negative and passive as disappointment.

The *Misérables* is mainly the story of two human creatures, a man and a woman, who have suffered nearly as much degradation and sorrow as humanity can endure, and who yet are never wholly criminal. Fate and our own fault, says the German proverb, are the source of all our ills ; but Victor Hugo appears to give the least share of the responsibility to the individual weaknesses of his characters. For fate, too, he substitutes society. In some sense society is the wronger, the destroyer, the degrader of Jean Valjean and of Fantine. They are ruined through human wickedness and the blundering savageness of human

law ; they are to be saved through human benevolence inspired by religion. There is little new in the story, but there is much which is wholly and thrillingly new in the story-teller. Too much, of course, there is of that peculiarly French style which seeks to surprise the reader ; but there is on the other hand much of a simplicity and even bareness of language, which the author did not exhibit in his earlier years. Where the book fails, not it alone, but Victor Hugo's whole principle of art fails. We will answer for it, that every English reader rose from the perusal of the second volume convinced that art *has* its limits, and that the author has sadly overstepped them. Exactly where M. Hugo remained within the boundary he has succeeded. The simple early story of Jean Valjean is a masterpiece of fiction and reality blended. Exactly where the author has crossed the fatal line, he has failed. The tale of Fantine is a monstrosity in literature. Victor Hugo has in this book accomplished the painful, revolting task of giving to the world the most intense and pre-Raphaelite picture of female suffering and abasement known to modern literature. He has spared us nothing—not a single detail. It is a hideous picture.. It is not good to look upon it. Let it be understood that I do not mean to say that Victor Hugo has been guilty of the paltry baseness of treating the subject with what is commonly called indelicacy. There is nothing in the story of Fantine's degradation open to that charge. There is nothing in it untrue. No doubt

it is the commonest thing in the world that a girl once beautiful and innocent should fall into error, and then into shame and misery ; that she should drink, and prowl about the streets ; that she should be rudely jeered at and coarsely insulted by blackguards ; that her garments should be torn off her back ; that, before sinking into final degradation, she should have sold her hair (Victor Hugo adds, indeed, another pang, and makes his “miserable” sell some of her beautiful teeth) ; that she should be buffeted by policemen, and dragged, half-naked, to prison, her limbs trailing through the mud of the streets ; that her consumptive tendencies should be aggravated by want of food and want of sleep, by drink, and by nakedness ; and that she should die penitent indeed, but under circumstances of the most intense misery. All this, no doubt, is common ; but is all this, described as Victor Hugo has described it, a fitting theme of romance ? Is the artist to pass from the pathetic and the terrible into the horrible and the loathsome ? The necessity that society should know the real state of all its suffering members cannot be pleaded as an excuse for writing of this kind. No rational being can be ignorant that women like Fantine are deluded, and suffer ignominiously, and perish. Even if this were not known, it may be impressed on the heart of the world without the romancist turning his pages into a hideous record of mere human degradation. Until I become convinced that the painter may choose as his subject the deformities and

diseases of a hospital ward, and transfer to his canvas every horrifying detail of wound and sore, I cannot believe that a romancist is justified in reproducing every sickening incident of abject shame and suffering which belongs to the closing scenes of the career of a Fantine. The sense aches at this picture of wretched, degraded, unsexed womanhood; and the reader turns away with a positive sense of relief, even to the deep gloom of Jean Valjean's second doom.

The examination of the character of Jean Valjean is the analysis of the whole scheme, philosophy, heart, and moral of the book. When proceeding to criticise this extraordinary effort of Victor Hugo's genius and patient art, we shall soon see that it must satisfy three requirements in order to be pronounced a complete success. First, is the character in itself, regarded simply as the ideal hero of Victor Hugo's story, a consistent, artistic, and impressive figure as the central form of the romance? Second, is it a successful picture of a probable, or at least possible, human being? Third—and from this final test we cannot release the creator of Jean Valjean—is it true as regards the practical moral which it professes to inculcate? Now as to the first of these three requirements, I do not hesitate to pronounce the character of Jean Valjean absolutely perfect. Nothing I know of in any romance surpasses for simplicity, for strength, for consistency, for homely pathos, for occasional outbursts of dramatic, not theoretic, energy, the whole character

of the redeemed convict. From the moment when, dusty, footsore, and spirit-broken, he tramps the street of the village, repulsed from door to door, through his regenerated and happy episode in M.-sur-M., his flights and escapes, his quiet wanderings in the gardens of the Luxembourg, his deepening affection for Cosette, his final sacrifice, the career of Jean Valjean is a subject of absorbing interest, love, and pity. Victor Hugo's usual tendency to exaggeration and passion for strained antithesis seem to fade from him when he approaches the presence of his convict hero. Assuredly the character of Jean Valjean alone would suffice to vindicate for the author the reputation of a great artist. The creator of so simple, touching, and noble a piece of idealization can afford to be told that his hero is not a being of the common-place and real world. Criticism, when it has paid its highest eulogy to the poetic genius which called Jean Valjean into existence, is compelled to say that no such being as Victor Hugo has portrayed ever did or could arise out of the early circumstances and training which the author has chosen to describe. Let us concede the marvellous, the all but miraculous redemption of Valjean under the inspiration of the good Bishop's words of charity and love. Let us grant that the soul of goodness which was in the rough and simple peasant, which had fallen into a torpor like that of death in the petrified nature of the felon and the convict, revived suddenly into a never-fading, never-fluctuating life at one breath

from a good and benignant being. Even this requires a large and liberal concession from any one who considers for a moment the complicated problem of man's nature—the errors, the weaknesses, the failures and fallings, even of the very best of men. But admitting that the soul of Jean Valjean might have been thus miraculously regenerated, are we to believe that the habits and the manners stamped by half a lifetime of the prison and the galleys, of association with the rudest, the basest, and most brutal of human creatures, could have dropped off in a moment as the rags of the beggar girl in the pantomime give place at the touch of a wand to the lustrous garment and spangles and flowers of the Columbine? The transformation of Jean Valjean is absolutely not less miraculous and complete than that by which Byron's *Deformed* puts on in a moment the beautiful form and noble lineaments of Achilles. The stolid, uncouth, ignorant French peasant, the brutalized savage felon, outcast of the gaols and the galleys, who thrusts himself into the presence of the benignant Bishop, becomes converted in a brief moment of time, not merely into a penitent and self-sacrificing man, but into the very *beau idéal* of native nobleness, untutored dignity, unaffected grace of mind and even manner. No harsh or vulgar trait, no instantaneous lapse into rudeness or selfishness, no trace whatever of the habits of the hovel, the dungeon, or the hulks betrays the Jean Valjean who sits by the bed of the dying Fantine, and who nurtures, trains,

and loves Cosette. So brave, modest, and serene ; so gentle, dignified, and noble, this is a very hero of romance, a sane Quixote, a Bayard of modern and middle life. Any one who believes that the very best heart ever placed in a human bosom could have suddenly converted an ignorant peasant, whose only schooling was the convict-cell and the galleys, into a being of this order, may pronounce my judgment incorrect when I affirm that Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean, a masterpiece of ideal art, is no whit more true to real life than the Count of Monte Christo or Bulwer's Eugene Aram.

To this extent then I consider Victor Hugo to have failed. He has produced a beautiful work of art, but he has described an impossible human being. Something remains to be said about the third requisite, which, as I have already observed, the author had to satisfy. The moral of Jean Valjean's career is the philosophy of the whole book. Is this true or false, a success or a failure ? It would be mere pedantry to judge of the ordinary romancist by the practical application and philosophic value of the moral he appears to inculcate. But Victor Hugo set out to produce something very much higher than a mere romance, and he and his admirers alike claim for him that he has accomplished the task. He claims to have taught society a profound and practical moral lesson in the shape of a romance ; nay he claims to have grappled successfully with one of the most difficult and compli-

cated problems which occupy the thinkers and the law-makers of all civilized society. Now I shall not merely ask whether he has accomplished this, but whether he has helped us one single step towards it? Nay more, I am inclined to ask whether he has not, on the whole, pointed in the wrong direction? The scope of Victor Hugo's teaching in this book appears to be that vaguest, easiest, oldest lesson of second-class morality, that "society" is responsible for the errors and wrong-doings of each individual member. Society has made Valjean a robber, Fantine a prostitute; society can and ought to redeem those whom it has caused to fall; it is society's business altogether. The individuals are always victims to be pitied and comforted; the social mass are the betrayers, the deserters, the criminals. This is undoubtedly an affecting as well as a very easily conveyed lesson: it has of course its deep tincture of truth, it touches the hearts of most people, and relieves the consciences of a good many. No doubt circumstances, or, as Victor Hugo would prefer to express it, society, must be held responsible for much of the lives of all of us. Had Jean Valjean been trained in early life for the Church, it is very unlikely that he would ever have been a convict. Had Fantine never met with a profligate, she probably never would have been seduced. All this is so indisputably true, that we may set it down as truism. In judging of the life of a man or woman, we shall act stupidly and blindly if we fail to take into account early training, condition,

surroundings, temptations ; but nothing can be more untrue and more dangerous than the professedly moral and philosophical doctrine which would shift the entire burden of each man's and woman's responsibility to the shoulders of society and circumstances in general. Nor, even if this doctrine were true ; if on society, and not on the individual, should always rest the responsibility, do I see how Victor Hugo has helped us out of the great difficulty which stands in the way of enforcing that responsibility. Would it really put an end to robbery, if when the thief had stolen our silver spoons, we set him at liberty, and gave him our candlesticks as well ? Would it really promote the morality of the world if we were to pay a greater homage, a deeper reverence to the woman who had succumbed to temptation than to her who had triumphed over it, because the former had, like Magdalen, thus proved that she loved ? If this be not Victor Hugo's moral, I am unable to perceive the drift of his teaching. It is not necessary to tell us that convicts who have stolen through mere poverty ought not to be treated with cruel and brutal severity ; that a woman who has sinned through her affections ought not to be flung out of society into irremediable degradation and ruin. All this we know ; where we fail to prove our knowledge in practice, it is surely not because of our ignorance. The problem which we have to solve is the reconciliation of the philosophical doctrine of necessity with that of individual

responsibility. We may never arrive at a theoretical solution, but we are compelled every day to attempt to solve the difficulty in some rude way, and the man deserves well of the world who helps us in any degree to a more satisfactory method of accomplishing the task. The most enlightened criminal code, the wisest and most merciful of judges, can only approach to a rough kind of compromise between the due allowance to be made in the case of each individual criminal for the conspiring influence of circumstances and cerebral organization, and the first law of nature—self-preservation. Society, too, for its own sake, has to attempt the same compromise every day in an extra-judicial fashion. Now it is easy enough to show where society or the criminal code has made a mistake on the side of self-preservation. This Victor Hugo has shown us powerfully, pathetically, eloquently, in the instance of Jean Valjean. If the book were a romance and nothing more, he would have done quite sufficient; but the work professes to be a grand moral and philosophical lesson, destined to show society one of its greatest errors and the way to reform it. Does the warmest admirer of *Les Misérables* pretend that it has helped us in the least towards a wiser and truer blending of justice and mercy than that which socially and judicially we strive to carry out? Can the most sanguine of philanthropists suppose that any new light for the guidance of society in the treatment of criminals has been shed by the touching story of

Jean Valjean ; that any new hint for the preservation of the virtue of womanhood has been suggested by the fall and the fate of Fantine ? On the contrary, I believe that the main tendency of Victor Hugo's great work is to exaggerate grievously the power of condition and circumstance, and to put out of sight altogether the responsibility and the free will of the individual. The moral of the story is entirely one-sided. It would be unjust towards the public not to point out and protest against the influence of exaggerated views, which, dangerous in themselves, become infinitely more dangerous when advocated with the eloquence, earnestness, and genius of the author of *Les Misérables*.

Thus much it is right to say in condemnation of the work when judged, as its author has insisted that it shall be judged, as a moral and philosophical lesson. But I think the world of to-day and of future generations will prefer to estimate the book in a manner which may allow a warmer recognition of its merits ; that is, as a work of art and a romance. Thus criticised, it must be pronounced one of the masterpieces of the age which produced it. Faults, eccentricities, redundancies, extravagances, errors against good taste, it unquestionably has. Any critic who liked the task might devote a whole essay to these alone. But when the most invidious criticism has done its worst, the immense power, the noble character of the book would remain uninjured. The foundation for half-a-dozen great reputations might be discovered in the pages of

*Les Misérables.* Where it fails or goes wrong, the author's theory and not his genius has betrayed him. The presence of genius is felt by the reader in every chapter and page. A deep insight into human nature, a warm and almost passionate sympathy with human suffering, a pictorial power scarcely rivalled in our days, a dramatic force which strikes out new and thrilling effects in every new situation, an inexhaustible variety of character, incident, and illustration, and a vivid eloquence absolutely unequalled by any living author of the same class,—these are some, and only some, of the leading qualities, by means of which Victor Hugo has made *Les Misérables* one of the great literary monuments of the century.

Nothing that Victor Hugo has since written requires much examination. In this essay I have not attempted anything like a systematic criticism of his works. My object has been rather to illustrate his theory of art, and to do so by examining those of his works which for good or bad most strikingly exhibit it in artistic action. I hold Victor Hugo then to be a man of great genius, whose only conspicuous failures are due to his fanatical pursuit of an artistic theory which is at best only partially true. Victor Hugo's theory of the romantic claims, as the domain of the poet and the romancist, all that is real in life and in man; and it allows the real to embrace all that can actually enter into the mind and heart of man. It proposes to photograph ordinary human life and to

explore the deepest secrets of the human heart as well. It denies the right of criticism to limit in any way the artist's range except by the bounds of reality. Ordinarily we call certain phases of life, certain forms or deformities of humanity, unfitting subjects of art. Victor Hugo and his school would scoff at such a limitation, and pronounce him who prescribes it a classicist and a pedant. All that is, belongs, they assert, to the romancist. Every stage of human suffering, every phase of human error, or folly, or crime, every chamber of horrors with which the dark places of life may be made darker—all these, deeply concerning as they do the real existence of man, are the province of the truly human and sympathetic artist. If your nerves are too delicate for that sort of thing, then turn away from it by all means. Get a volume of Della Cruscan poems, hold a perfume bottle to your nostrils, and fancy yourself delightfully literary, sympathetic, and refined. But do not venture to criticise the artist of a different school, who believes that if pain, suffering, and shame exist, the world ought to know all about them. Do not expect that the poet is to become a mere warbler of serenades for your sake, or the romancist to confine himself to the narration of pretty stories for the delectation of polite boarding-schools.

Obviously this theory is to a certain extent profoundly true. The romantic principle is in itself the foundation of much that must be classed among the greatest and best in literature. But Victor Hugo did

not perceive that art, like politics, is a science of compromise, in which the pursuit of a logical extreme is always dangerous and often fatal. He formed his theory from observing that every great writer who produced a lasting work did so by stepping over the conventional limitations set out for the art of his day. But he failed to perceive that no man ever accomplished any lasting literary triumph who did not, consciously or unconsciously, acknowledge that art, too, has its domain, its sacred limits, beyond which it cannot pass except to failure. Every one must sympathize with the author of *Cromwell*, when he exclaims, bitterly and truthfully, "Other nations say Homer, Shakspeare, Dante; we say Boileau." But he had only grasped part, and not the most valuable part, of the truth. The worst despotism which Boileau introduced would not be attended with as evil results to poetic art as that kind of freedom which Victor Hugo sought to originate. The one, at most, only prescribed a certain method by which the poet must attain his object; the other fanatically ignored the poet's object altogether. To make conformity to certain rules an indispensable law, is indeed to insure failure of a certain kind, but to deny or ignore the truth that art of every character has an element to work in and an object to work for, is to insure far more complete and hopeless failure. The genius of Racine and Corneille was cramped to a lamentable degree by the method to which they were forced to conform. But the works of Corneille and

Racine will never cease to be read. Unless a time ever comes when noble types of heroism, and self-devotion, and religion—of woman's purity and man's exalted courage, are disregarded, those great poets will still influence intellects and hearts. Racine and Corneille kept steadfastly before them the true and the highest object of their labour—the object which alone makes art of any value whatever—the object which Lessing, the greatest of critics, describes as the end of all art—the object which every great artist, from Homer to Tennyson, has instinctively or from conviction followed out. It was the object to which the best of every school, real and ideal, romantic or classic, have steadfastly turned. It was the object of awakening delight, adding to the world's riches new thoughts and images of beauty and of power—of appealing to and arousing all the noblest feelings of the human heart—of making art thus to work in harmony for man's improvement and elevation with science and with religion. The paths by which to approach that object are as various as the ways of men. Many great artists have marred their own efforts by approaching it through devious paths, and within too narrow limits. Others, of inferior gifts, have made their labours of undying influence by seeking the same goal through a freer road. But it would, I think, be impossible to point out an instance of any work ever attaining a permanent influence in literature which was not guided by intuition or by deliberate purpose towards this end.

I do not mean to charge Victor Hugo with any of the most serious transgressions against this principle. It would of course be entirely unjust and absurd to class him with certain of his country's more recent *littérateurs* whose names are the synonyms for depraved taste and morality worse than spurious. Deep sympathy with innocence and with suffering, stern and steadfast abhorrence of vice of every kind, manly detestation of tyranny in every form, soldierly, kingly, priestly—these characteristics illumine every one of his works. It is chiefly against his own genius that Victor Hugo has erred. By mistaking its object he has too often marred its influence and turned its strength into weakness. Obviously the more energetically you labour in a wrong direction, the further you remove from the right one. The slowness of the tortoise would have been a positive advantage over the celerity of the hare, had both got on a wrong track which led away from the goal. Where Victor Hugo has failed, it is almost always because he has sought success in a wrong direction. He has sought to surprise rather than to influence permanently. He plunges into the regions of the bizarre, the fantastic, the hideous, the horrible, and ransacks there for objects with which to bewilder and appal his readers. But the human mind has no emotion which it is more difficult to keep long awake and active than surprise. It would be almost safe to pronounce that anything in poetry or painting which at first excites

surprise is an inferior production. Miracle-working pictures, observes Goethe, with literal as well as metaphorical truth, are generally trumpery pieces of art. From *Cromwell* to *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* the one defect pervades all Victor Hugo's works—the theory that true art is a miracle-working business which must labour independent of and even in defiance of the laws of the common world. His genius and his noble heart have carried him in triumph over the worst dangers of his theory, but his works taken as a whole are none the less a warning against the fate which he has been enabled to escape.





## Conversation and Talk.

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**T**HE epic poem has left the world—passed, according to the Tennysonian phrase; in music out of sight. The day of tragedy has departed. The era of the old, genuine oratory, for mere oratory's sake, is absolutely extinct. We have great parliamentary debaters,—men who can put close argument, and thought, and sarcasm into vigorous, fluent, and effective language: but the professional orator with his exordium and his peroration is not to be found on the floor of St. Stephen's. What is becoming of conversation? Is it too following the way of epic poetry, and tragedy, and oratory? There is certainly not less talk in the world now than there ever was; but in this country, at least, the growth of talk seems to be the decadence of conversation. It is not wholly imaginary, the falling off in this respect, like the lamentation of old people for the summers of their early years and the modest young women who

lived in their youthful days. Either all the writers who described bygone society, and all the people who can recal the habits of thirty or forty years ago, have conspired to deceive us, or there is a plain and undeniable decline in the tone of our conversation at present. As Pendennis feels disappointed after his first night of literary society, and its very commonplace gossip, so do most novices in company of any kind now feel, if they enter with any expectation of hearing the conversation which they have read of in novels and biographies. I do not at all regret that human beings never really carry on dialogues after the fashion of Plato or Erasmus, in which one individual keeps all the eloquence and wisdom to himself, and the other speaker plays the part of the man of straw, and is set up only to be upset. This kind of conversation was happily no whit more real, as mere interchange of living men's ideas, than the modern Bulwerian dialogues ; for there no end of Platos may be found, each with a touch of Alcibiades ; one gifted individual uttering a long and splendid sentimental monologue, clouded with abstractions and starred with capital letters, to which a second equally endowed, replies in an oration quite as elaborate, vast, high sounding, and Germanesque. One cannot help thinking how the author hammered and polished at sentence by sentence of those speeches which his heroes are supposed to talk off with such spontaneous ease ;— how he effaced, added, amended, made copy after

copy, before the dialogue had obtained brilliancy and splendid vagueness fit for the lips of his Godolphins, Zanonis, Glanvilles, and Maltravers. Nor have I any fuller faith in the big, resonant words of grand old Christopher North's *noctes cœnæque deorum*, with the encouraging "Describe, James, describe," introducing some magnificent burst of picture-language, where Arthur's Seat or Easedale Tarn seemed shadowed in every sentence. We are not to despise our own little, vapid talking circle, merely because they do not pretend to any thing of this kind. Most of us would very soon have acknowledged our weariness, if we had long to keep up the nervous strain of following such a style in ordinary converse. If real life never listened to such talkers, no one has much reason to regret their non-existence out of books.

Nor does the deficiency of our own time consist in the fact that we have lost the great, real talkers of the past age, and that we have not supplied their places. They were a grand old race, the extinct professors of the art of talk—the Johnsons, and Burkes, and Cole-ridges, and Goethes, who were wont to pour forth their sentiments over the heads of listening and delighted groups for hours together. But human life has grown too active of late to receive even those magnificent monologues in exchange for conversation. The forms and long dead levels of social intercourse would scarcely be worth enduring, merely for the sake of

exercising our passive receptivity. The question is, however, whether we have not carried ourselves in this, as we do in most things, far away towards the other extreme. Now that we no longer tolerate conversational rulers, and have brought our talk down to a common level, is our universal equality and brotherhood of inanity an improvement upon the days when kings ruled our society, and patriarchs harangued us in our hours of relaxation? These latter may have kept the talk a little too much to themselves. Johnson may sometimes have been rude, and Coleridge often misty; the Ninons, Rambouilletts, Sévignés, and Montagues, may have been too airy, vivacious, and sparkling for your solemn and practical thinkers; to be pumped into for hours may, as Carlyle says, have occasionally proved an unexhilarating process; but all this was surely better than the vacuous babble of the drawing-room, or the heavy common-place of the gentlemen's dinner-party. If we meet a literary or learned man now, he no longer takes up his stand on the hearth-rug, and pours out a stream of words for half the evening. Now he whispers in a corner, sneaks quietly away; and, for aught the general company can tell, might have been, instead of a fountain, a mere pump. It is difficult to see precisely what we have gained by the change of manners.

It is profoundly, ponderously absurd, although profound and ponderous Gibbon said it, to declare that

solitude is the nurse of genius. Solitude and seclusion are two very different things. A man seldom gets much by incessant lonely gropings in his own mental depths beyond morbid self-conceit. He becomes self-absorbed,—falls in love with his own image reflected within, and undergoes a metaphorical Narcissus-drowning. If general society, as at present formed, sometimes fritters intellect away, solitude as often rusts it out. Let a man, when he has something definite to do, or to think over, betake himself to solitude ; but let him not fail to return, every now and then, to an active intercourse with outward, busy life. Which have produced and cultivated the greatest intellects ?—the mountains and plains, or the streets and alleys ? Half the best intelligence of the modern world has been fostered, or perfected at least, under the smoke and amid the noise of London. But it is too true that, as general society now seems disposed to shape itself, no hermit's cave, no howling wilderness, can be more profitless or waste. The company which gathered around the *ruelle* of the Hôtel Rambouillet may have talked much euphuistic nonsense ; the *femmes savantes* may have prated much pedantry ; but neither the nonsense nor the pedantry was so barren, so utterly empty, as that kind of thing which constitutes the staple converse of at least three-fourths of the ordinary drawing-rooms in this country at the present day. Is there any one who has to meet

many people, and to mix much in general society, who is not frequently forced to observe that, in whatever else we are rising, the tone of our ordinary conversation is falling? At least, that if it be not absolutely sinking, it certainly has relatively sunk,—that it has not kept pace with the general development of knowledge and of intellect? Who does not feel that the talk of general society at present is, when compared with the growth of education and thought, mere baby-talk? It is one thing to relax the bow; it is another to let it lie damp, feeble, and stringless all day long. Why are we all so shy of communicating our ideas to each other? The fashion of pretending to be unemotional is a very debilitating one. How often do men and women spend hours together, each of whom has a heart and intellect filled up with some theme; and yet they will all beat about, and solemnly trifle, and be purposely frivolous, and talk as idiots, when there is no Brutus-like necessity for assuming imbecility! The fear of seeming pedantic, or too much in earnest, keeps many a learned and eloquent man from speaking to his friends as he could and would speak, or as he actually does write. Many a warm-hearted and high-minded being remains mute, or apparently trifling, although he has deep thoughts filling his soul and bursting for utterance, but which are never to be spoken to friends. How many real conversations, spoken out of the fulness of the heart and the intellect, can any living man count over as enjoyed by

him? Our shyness, which keeps us silent when we ought to speak, very often, since we must have some mode of expression, drives us into print when neither gods nor men, nor newspaper columns, have need of our printed experiences. There are many men, more perhaps than would readily avow it at the first, who have never in their lives spoken out to mortals their full feelings upon some of the themes which lay closest to their minds and hearts, and who would almost feel ashamed if they found themselves approaching such a confidential, real expression. How many men are there who can never be thoroughly known, because they have never thoroughly spoken out,—whose thoughts and feelings, when they go to write, congeal and drop upon the paper, dull, frozen, lifeless, untransparent sentences? In a downright fribble age, fribble talk is the proper vernacular; but a thinking, active, progressive age putting on a fribble masquerade as its only notion of relaxation is a very whimsical and pitiful spectacle.

Men and women must be of matured or singularly vigorous intellect for whom the every-day chat of the circle in which they move does not constitute a kind of gospel of life. If he who drinks beer thinks beer, so he who drinks inanity thinks inanity. What to the young is the influence of the occasional admonition of parent or tutor, the reading of a sensible book, the monthly article in a magazine, the weekly sermon, compared with the perennial and close influence of the

daily and nightly talk of those with whom he mixes ? If you would know what a man really is, says the high-hearted Fichte, endeavour to learn what direction his thoughts take when he is alone and unrestrained. But what directs the current of a boy's thoughts like the talk he hears all day around him ? What interesting and valuable converse that is which is exchanged in the smoking-room from twelve o'clock midnight outwards ! It is not that many of these young men could not converse. Many of them have read, and studied, and thought, and very likely written. But it is the whim of the age not to acknowledge earnestness in anything, and the man who talks seriously among other young men is rather likely to be written down a bore, at least, if not by the more offensive designation which Dogberry demanded. Listen to the conversation in the drawing-room with the ladies,—the vapid, soulless chat. Do men fancy that, whatever one particular woman may be alone, a number of women together must have neither brains nor sympathies ? Why must men and women of intelligence and education assemble together, and for hours no intelligent thought be expressed ? It would be something if this really were relaxation, like Scipio's throwing pebbles, or Henri Quatre's coursing round the room with the children on his back, or Goethe smacking cart-whips for a wager. But it is not. Nine out of every ten young men would tell, if they spoke the truth, that to talk for an hour to two or

three women is a wearisome and exhausting labour. No doubt the ladies find it just as fatiguing and dreary. The bringing one's mind down to the proper level of ordinary conversational imbecility, and keeping it there, is a dreadful task. There was once a reporter in the gallery of the House of Commons who was wont to declare that he could not transcribe his notes of a certain well-known bore until he had first imbibed some of the heaviest porter, to reduce his intellect to the proper level.

Dress and servants are the proverbial staple of feminine conversation. Are there many subjects entering into the common business of life upon which more valuable interchange of thought might take place among women? If ladies only wished to make their talk valuable to each other, they might converse long enough of clothes and servants without exhausting all that ought to be said and heard. We, of the male sex, are too fond of making fun of the frivolous talk about dress. It is not so very much less valuable than talk about cigars or terriers; and it has advantages, which I need not stop to point out, over various other subjects not uncommonly introduced in men's conversation. Few circumstances connected with her social existence are more important to a woman than the way in which she dresses herself and her children,—her skill in selecting and adapting the materials of dress. Even the proper combination of colours is a topic well worthy of serious talk and serious thought.

Probably we should see far fewer eccentricities and absurdities of feminine costume, if sensible women more often talked sensibly together on the subject. Because people think it wise to regard the dress question as frivolous, no one ventures to utter anything but nonsense about it. Who was not weary of the flood of nonsense and small jocularity which drenched society lately on the subject of crinoline? *Quousque, crinolina!* How long, O crinoline, did you abuse our patience? Long ago would it have been got rid of, if ladies talked of dress as rationally and as seriously as nearly all are capable of doing. In an age far less cultivated than ours, women really led the conversation, such as it was, and talked of war and peace, of politics and books, at least as wisely and as wittily as men did. Now that all the nonsense about the beauty of feminine ignorance, and the contrast between scientific lore and household neatness has been happily exploded, why may not women who can read, and think, and write, prove to those around them that they can converse as well?

Why may we not all dethrone mere talk, and set up conversation again? Why not make the social interchange of words a pleasure, and an improving pleasure, instead of a dreary conventional task, which must somehow be spread over a certain length of time? Why must a man, when he has really something to say, keep it to himself, and when he has nothing to say, bestow it upon his friends? Why not

all of us, when we go into company, talk our best, as we all try to look and dress our best? The remembrance of youth, says Ali, is a sigh. Why should the remembrance of an evening in English society be a yawn? We are not necessarily such bores to each other, if we could only be induced to believe in ourselves. Every one can interest his neighbour in conversation, if he have but the will to try; and can be interested in turn, if he resolves to listen. Sir Walter Scott picked up half his miscellaneous knowledge by conversing (really conversing) with all manner of persons at random, and endeavouring to draw them out on their special subjects. The great novelist declared that he never conversed with any one from whom he did not derive a knowledge of something which he should otherwise not have known, and which he should regret to have lost. Goethe would converse with carpenters, masons, gardeners, paupers, old women, and glean something valuable from every conversation. Sydney Smith said he lived twenty-five years in the country, and never met a bore. Where any one interlocutor is resolved either to give or receive something worth having, a conversation of any kind is of value. The pitiful sight to see is where a number of persons, who could really improve and delight each other, are flung together to talk, only because it would be out of etiquette to remain silent. How dreary becomes the countenance even where the people have actually come for pleasure! How little

any one really cares about what he is saying ! How infinitely less he cares to listen to what any one else observes in return ! "That is a wearisome feast," says Thackeray, "that banquet of wit where no love is." But what on earth can equal the weariness of that social banquet where there is neither love nor wit ?

We do not want wisdom always. Reverie and then dulness would very soon follow where pedantry insisted upon maintaining the perpetual lead. We do not want eternal wit, like Congreve's or Sheridan's dialogues. But that the general tone of common conversation shall be raised, is really a very serious need. Let every one express his best thoughts his best way, with due regard to those around him, and the sphere in which he is temporarily placed. Let us not have disquisitions on political economy or international law in the midst of a roomful of young ladies ; or metaphysics at a country dinner party ; or demonstrations of the errors of the Church of Rome in a railway carriage. But if a man be talking only of flowers, or pins'-heads, or shrimps, his talk need not be utter waste. There may be something in it. It is not so much the subject as the treatment which, in conversation as in art, gives the value. If a man be simple, unaffected, and a little in earnest even when most pleasant, he can hardly fail to converse well when he means to do so. No man ever writes all he feels upon any subject. Behind the fullest utterance on paper

there are some shades of thought which the pen cannot reproduce. Only in true conversation do we reach each other's real nature. It will be a conclusive proof that our society is growing more manly, earnest, simple, unconventional, when Conversation begins to take the place of Talk.





## Novels with a Purpose.

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HE novelist ought to be the happiest of all authors. He enjoys the most perfect freedom known to literature. Any ray of genius, any special faculty whatever which he may happen to possess, is at full liberty to develope itself in the direction which best suits it. The novelist almost alone among his brethren of letters may "walk his own wild way whither that leads him." He is allowed an almost complete immunity from the trammels and prescriptions and pedantries of criticism. No one thinks of ordaining for him that he must tread in one particular path and no other ; that he must beat round and round for ever in one prescribed circle. For him there is no dignity of history. For him there are no dramatic unities. For him there are no laws of rhythm, no dactyles and spondees, no Alexandrine and *ottava rima*, or Spenserian or English heroic. There are no codes of critical laws to ordain that a romancist

must follow this or that pattern, must not deal with this or that topic, must only introduce this character or situation on these given conditions. There are no contending schools of romance critics ; there is no mutual persecution among romancists ; there is no wrangling of classic and romantic known among the free races who write novels. Innumerable are the poets who have been blighted because of Virgil ; the dramatists who had to waste all their life's energies trying to dance in the Sophoclean fetters, or to jump in the Terentian sack ; the historians cursed to everlasting stupidity and oblivion, because critical custom prescribed that they must write in a dead language which was once the living tongue of Sallust and Tacitus. Corneille might have moved the whole world and all generations if he had not been condemned to observe some supposed adherence to imaginary laws of Greek tragedy. The imbecile pedantry of the rules of epical poetry finally killed the epic poem altogether, and now the age of the epic seems almost as extinct an era as that of the mastodon. Dante was only saved by a happy venture of reckless audacity from becoming a petrifaction in the Latin tongue ; and there was a point in the career of Molière when he seemed likely to fall a victim to the memory of Plautus. Indeed in poetry and the drama, and perhaps even in history, hardly any man has ever become great except by braving in the first instance the literary dangers and penalties of rebellion. The motto of Danton was

almost always the watchword of him who desired for his epic, his tragedy, or his history a better fate than the critical approval of to-day, and the contempt or neglect of all succeeding generations.

All this the novelist escaped. Le Sage was not condemned *in limine* and out of hand because the first volume of *Gil Blas* failed to follow in the track of Cervantes. No one insisted that *Tom Jones* ought to have talked in the style of the *Grand Cyrus* or for ever held his peace. The existence of *Tom Jones* did not necessitate sentence of death upon *Waverley*; nor did *Waverley* interfere with *Oliver Twist*, nor *Oliver Twist* darken the rising prospects of *Pendennis*. If a man or woman attempts to be a novelist and fails, the blame cannot be laid to the account of pedantic critical legislation. Perhaps this happy freedom was greatly owing in the first instance to the fact that criticism deliberately ignored the novelist altogether, and regarded him as a creature outside the pale of art, no more responsible to rule and law of critical courts than Richardson's show is expected to conform to the dramatic unities. It is only of recent days that critics have begun seriously to occupy themselves in the consideration of prose fiction. It forced itself on them by its popularity and its influence. When it became utterly impossible to ignore it any longer, when criticism must either condescend to recognise the new and growing power or submit to abdicate its own special functions

altogether, then only did it acknowledge the novelist as a personage having a distinct and important place in literature. It was then, however, too late to set about laying down laws, and forming schools, and prescribing this and proscribing that, and attempting all the freaks of pedantic power in which criticism delighted to indulge from the days of Zoilus to those of Rymer, and from the age of Rymer to the age of Schlegel. In our more liberal generation, we seem to have got rid almost entirely of the canonical laws and ecclesiastical courts of literature. Our poets do as they like, and so long as they do it well remain unwhipt of justice. Our dramatists, if we had any, might develope their genius with the freedom even of eccentricity, and no critic would venture to hint of unities neglected or Elizabethan models ignored. We have all come at last to recognise the great truth, which if perceived earlier would have saved authorship much suffering and criticism much blundering—the truth that genius, like the strong man and the waterfall of a poetic axiom, makes its own channel. The novelist, therefore, now enjoys that leave and licence by right of matured public opinion which he formerly obtained only by virtue of his outlawed social position. He was always free, but at one time his was only the freedom of Bohemia and the *demi-monde*—a liberty to do as he liked because society regarded him as beneath its dignified notice, and outside the pale of its virtuous laws. He may now write for a purpose or for

no purpose, he may be a politician, a satirist, or a mere teller of stories ; he may be a realist or an idealist ; he may be mirthful or melancholy ; he may find his subjects anywhere, and conduct his readers whither he will ; he is sure to be criticised and judged on the ground which he has spontaneously assumed. He will be valued for what he is, and not simply condemned because he is not something else. He will be estimated for what he has done and for his manner of doing it, and is not likely to hear a word of complaint urged because he has not done something which he never professed or desired to accomplish.

One result of all this is that the novelist's art is by far the most fresh, vigorous, and flourishing of all the literary professions of the day. We have, or we had until lately, two great, supreme novelists ; two men who would have been justly accounted great at any period or in any country ; perhaps, indeed, no age ever produced a contemporaneous pair more distinguished in their art. But besides these, the present generation of English literature reckons many novelists and romancists who are entitled to high and honourable distinction in the field of letters. Mr. Disraeli's political novels still remain, in their own peculiar range, unequalled, and I venture to think, not to be surpassed. Mr. Trollope has brought easy realism in the painting of a certain section or two of English life to a degree of perfection such as nobody, not even Thackeray himself, had attained before. As a novelist and a man of genius

he is indeed not to be compared with the author of *Vanity Fair*, but within the narrow range which he prescribes for himself, he has realized something which assuredly no English novelist had done before. Charlotte Brontë was a woman endowed with a power which, in any literary age, would fairly have been regarded as extraordinary, and a longer life might have enabled her to reconcile that power with an equal degree of artistic refinement and matured self-command. The career of the authoress of *Adam Bede* and *Romola* is yet, I trust, only opening, and no other woman ever contributed to English fiction with anything like the same promise of capacity to attain a supreme place. We could all mention many others endowed with remarkable gifts, even if we were to leave out of our consideration that much admired and much-abused class—that class whom nearly all critics condemn, and nearly all readers now run after—the Sensation Novelists. But there is something to be said in defence of that most popular section of our romancists too. In the first place they are an inevitable reaction against the realism of far greater authors; and in the next place, with all their grievous sins against art and taste, and perhaps, even in one sense against morals, they are, on the whole, much superior to the sensation novelists whose tales lifted the hair and curdled the blood of the preceding generation. Even Miss Braddon's poisonings, and stranglings, and conflagrations, and plunges into wells,

are but modest and inoffensive incidents when compared with some of the sensational events wherewith Maturin was wont to delight his horrified readers. Considering the facility with which novels are written, published, and read in our day, considering that a certain public is to be found for anything which issues in three volumes and calls itself a romance, it is really much to the credit of the age, and testifies highly to the progress of public education, that so many books of this class are produced which deserve to be read, and that so small a number, comparatively, are worthy only of utter contempt or positive condemnation.

The novelist is now our most influential writer. If he be a man of genius his power over the community he addresses is far beyond that of any other author. Macaulay's influence over the average English mind was narrow compared with that of Dickens; even Carlyle's was not on the whole so great as that of Thackeray. The readers of the *Idylls of the King* were but a limited number when compared with the readers of *Jane Eyre*; nor could Mr. Browning's finest poem pretend to attract as many admirers, even among people of taste and education, as were suddenly won by *Adam Bede*. Yet our English novelists are not by any means the most cosmopolitan in the public they address. No British authors are read in France as George Sand, and Victor Hugo, and Sue, and Dumas have been read in England. It may be doubted whether any contemporary English work

of fiction was read so extensively even in England as the *Mysteries of Paris*, or the *Wandering Jew*, or *The Count of Monte Christo*. All this shows how decisively the current of public feeling has lately set in favour of prose fiction. The influence of the novelist is beginning, too, to be publicly acknowledged of late more frankly than was once the fashion. For a long time his power over society, except as a mere teller of stories and provider of easy pastime, was ignored or disputed. It was, indeed, something like the power of women in politics ; an influence almost all-pervading, almost irresistible, but silent, secret, and not to be openly acknowledged. Anybody in politics who suddenly throws down the screen is sure to find Lady Teazle behind it. But it is generally thought better not to throw the screen down, and not to acknowledge that we hear the rustle of the petticoat. So it used to be with regard to the novelist. We all felt his influence, but were rather ashamed to acknowledge it. Only of late years have cabinet ministers ventured to quote from popular stories, and princes paid tribute to the genius of departed novelists.

Can this influence be turned to any direct and deliberate account ? Is it given to the novelist to accomplish any definite social object, to solve, or even help towards the solution of any vexed social question ? Is his "mission," to use the conventional phrase, merely that which Lessing assigned to art—to delight ? I am not undervaluing that mission. Taken in Lessing's

sense it involves all that art needs to attempt or to accomplish. It contains a distinct social purpose ; having an independent, important, elevated influence ; an essential part of education, civilization, and progress. I do not ask therefore in any depreciating tone, but merely as a question interesting and appropriate, whether this is all the novelist can do ? Can he without detriment to his artistic faculty set himself to solve some difficult social question, or to preach down some evil social influence ? Is there any real use in producing that class of books which readers can easily and distinctly identify if I call them, for lack of a better generic title, Novels with a Purpose ? The temptation to use the novel as a political or social pamphlet, satire or sermon, is so irresistible that earnest and clever, as well as flippant and shallow men and women, are continually making efforts, more or less unsuccessful, towards this end. There is always the chance that some successful hand may yet reconcile imagination with social philosophy, and so produce a work which shall be great as a story, and likewise great as a sermon, or a social science essay, or a political pamphlet, or a tract. Let me take as an illustration some two or three books which I only group together because they are all of the class which I venture to call Novels with a Purpose. In each case the author appears to have written, not because he or she felt inspired to tell a story, but because certain meditations, or convictions, or doubts, on some subject

connected with human society, seemed to find convenient and emphatic expression through the medium of a work of fiction. In each of these books the philosophical critic of humanity, the social reformer, or the social accuser, stands behind the story-teller and inspires and guides his utterance. In some instances the author has a direct and distinct purpose to accomplish ; in others he only expresses, vaguely perhaps, the general result of his meditations upon human life as seen in modern history. But in all alike the story is not the end, but only the means ; and this is the general characteristic which distinguishes the class of books I now desire to notice.

Mr. George Meredith is a novelist of the philosophic school. He is one of the boldest and the ablest of his class in our day. No man has more resolutely gone into literature with a total disregard of popularity. His "Shaving of Shagpat" produced something like a sensation, but he has not sought after sensations of any kind. Men without a tithe of his intellect have found a far wider celebrity. He is, indeed, but little known to the novel-reading public in general, and the announcement that a new novel has issued from his hands does not create any particular excitement among Mr. Mudie's ordinary subscribers. The public for whom one of Miss Braddon's novels must appear in a second edition the very day after its first publication, and for whom a third edition follows the second before the week is well out, is not likely to be fascinated

much by a philosophical author with whom thought is everything and incident nothing. Mr. Meredith's novels are not bought at a railway station to beguile a journey, or carried in the hand down to the seaside to while away the tedium of a semi-fashionable autumnal holiday. They are not amusing. A man or woman must be really in earnest to care much about them at all ; and the grand requisite of the popular novel of our day undoubtedly is that it shall require no thought or trouble of any kind. But those who read steadily through Meredith's books will find themselves well rewarded for their pains, if they have brains and culture enough in themselves to appreciate brains and culture in their author. Perhaps not a large proportion of the novel-reading public have now any distinct recollection of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. It was published in 1859, and I doubt not that the tramp of the Napoleonic legions and the cannon of Solferino and Magenta somewhat disturbed and deafened at that time the ears of the reading community ; and, indeed, I hardly know whether the English world has since had time to settle down into the temper which a philosophical novel requires. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is a novel of the thoughtful, deep, half-cynical wholly earnest kind which has so often striven, perhaps not with signal success, to arrest the attention of a public only craving for easy entertainment. It is somewhat in the style of Sterne ; a good deal more in the style of one who, acknowledging himself a follower

of Sterne, had a warmer heart, a purer soul, and a richer, quainter fancy than the British sentimentalist, I mean Jean Paul Richter. Mr. Meredith is often strikingly like Richter in style, with, almost as a matter of necessity, a considerable dash of the Carlylese phraseology. Here and there, indeed, something of unmistakeable and pure Carlyle flashes in. Life, as seen in certain worldly and cynical eyes, is for instance described as "a Supreme Ironic procession with Laughter of Gods in the background," and many such sentences occur here and there which read as if they were fairly plucked out of *Sartor Resartus* or *The French Revolution*. But the general character of the book is that of a sort of British Richter—Richter adapted to the ordinary course of English life, describing British schoolboys and aristocrats, and ladies of fashion, and ladies only too much in fashion, and country farmers, and Pimlico lodging-house keepers, and used-up, worthless men about town. There is nothing of imitation about all this, nor is any particular passage to be easily pointed out which seems to have been too palpably tinged with the "Titan" and "Hesperus" dyes. But the mind of the author appears to be, within its range, quite akin to that of Richter, and the affinities of fancy and feeling have no doubt been strengthened by close and loving study. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is full of passages which are rich in quaint poetic beauty; full of keen, pungent, epigrammatic sayings; of sharp,

shrewd reflections, revealing much insight into the realities of human nature; of the warm glow of an ardent, manly heart, and of a tender, graceful, genial blending of love and pity. Utterly unlike in its plan and its personages, the book somehow reminds one frequently of Richter's *Flegeljahre*; only that with George Meredith the ways and weaknesses and virtues of the two brothers seem fused into the one form of Richard Feverel. It is essentially a book with a purpose. Richard Feverel is the only son of a man of high rank and noble nature, who, disappointed in his domestic life, and left alone with his child, turns philosopher, and resolves to bring up the boy upon a grand, supreme system, which shall defy all the temptations and dangers of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is to be a moral and physical education combined, and all the resources of science and wealth (love appears to have been hardly considered in the matter) are to be exhausted to produce this perfect *homunculus*, this human wonder-flower. Of course the system fails, not extravagantly, or grotesquely, or farcically, or more, indeed, than any other system for the nurture of any other *homunculus* must almost of necessity fail. The *homunculus* cannot be kept in the glass bottle. Richard Feverel turns out on the whole a truthful and honourable man, but he is not much nearer to absolute truth and honour than most of the rest of us, and his life is neither happy nor perfect. He marries merely for love and not at all for science, and he is

not much more true, it must be avowed, to the one guide than to the other. He whom high moral principle was to have ruled supremely, is little better than the mere slave of impulse. All the good christening gifts which the fairy Science gave are more or less counteracted in their operation by the one malign spell cast by the fairy Passion whom the wise parent would fain not have bidden to the ceremony at ail. This is in a few words a sort of bald argument or bare outline of a brilliant, fanciful, and withal, earnest and thoughtful book. It is not a very pleasant book. The mere quaintnesses and fantastic eccentricities of the style, though modest and sober when compared with those in which Richter revels, are quite enough to warn the commonplace novel reader at the very beginning that these paths are rather thorny and tangled for his easy lounging walk. But apart from merely superficial objections, the story, with all its beauty, tenderness, and boldness, leaves a melancholy, and what is perhaps worse, an unsatisfactory impression behind it. People in general do not now, I think, read Rousseau's "Emile;" but those who are familiar with that masterpiece of a dead philosophy will probably agree with me as to the profoundly unsatisfactory and disheartening impression which its catastrophe leaves on the mind. Was it for this, the reader is inclined to ask, that science and love did their utmost to make one path smooth, one human existence bright, and noble, and happy? Was Emile from his birth

upward trained to the suppression of every selfish thought, to the scorn of all ignoble purpose, to an absolute devotion for truth, courage, purity, and benevolence, only that he might be deceived in his dearest affections, and that the crowning act of his existence might be an abnegation of self which we can scarcely even regard with admiration? The author had a right to shape his moral and deal with his creations as he would, yet we feel pained and shocked that he should have deemed it right to act thus harshly towards the beloved offspring of his system. Something of this surprise and disappointment fills the mind when we have reached the close of Richard Feverel's ordeal, and find that he has left his brightest hopes and dearest affections dead and buried behind him. The book closes with a sharp snap or crash; we feel as if something were suddenly wrenched away with pain and surprise; a darkness falls down upon the mind. Artistically I cannot help regarding this as a defect, although of course it is strictly in keeping with a recognition of the possibilities and even the daily chances of life. The course of the story does not lead us to expect anything of the kind, while its whole construction does lead us to expect a harmonious and dramatic conclusion. If Lady Castlewood in *Esmond* were to die suddenly of an unexpected fever; if Romola were to be killed off, like the wicked personage in one of Massinger's plays, by a flash of lightning, no one could say that either of

these catastrophes was out of the common range of human probabilities. But a work of fiction, whether novel or drama, requires harmony, coherence, or sequence ; and, although talent can assert its power over us in defiance of this law, yet it assuredly forfeits some of its legitimate influence when it fails to acknowledge it. One cannot see why poor little Lucy, Richard Feverel's gentle, innocent, loving wife, should be sacrificed in order that the ordeal of her husband should be made the more severe. In human nature, is such an ordeal really purifying and strengthening ? Is heavy, unexpected, and, it must be added, really unmerited calamity calculated to make the sufferer brave, and strong, and faithful ? Truly, I doubt it. And I doubt still more whether the ardent, impulsive, fitful sort of being Mr. Meredith has painted as his hero, would become any the better for having so fantastic and remorseless a penalty attached by fate to his father's system and his own single transgression. A novelist is free to write a book with a purpose if he likes, but having done so, he must submit to be judged according to the nature of his purpose and the clearness with which he has developed it. In this respect I read *Richard Feverel* fascinated, I laid it down dissatisfied. What of the sowing of wild oats, whereof the novelist has so much to say, of which he has so many remarks that are fanciful and humorous, and so many that are sound and shrewd ? Are they to be sown or not, these wild

oats ? Richard Feverel does not sow his in time, but he scatters just one little handful rather late in season, and it produces such a ghastly and Cadmean crop, that all the early flowers and fruits of his life are choked and blighted. I do not see how we are brought any nearer by the experience of Richard Feverel to the solution of that great social question about the sowing of the human wild oats. The author approaches it boldly enough, and sometimes alludes to it in words which perhaps may cause startled hands occasionally to cover very modest eyes. But even those who think with me that the business of art as well as the business of life, sometimes requires a little putting away of formulas and suppression of scruples, will not find that they derive much more of distinct and wholesome counsel from Richard Feverel, than they might have had from the most decorous and maidenly of the John Halifax school. Roderick Random is one type of young man. We acknowledge him truthful, plain, and vigorous enough, but he cannot do much to help us on with the work of human improvement ; for while he frankly acknowledges all his errors, he clearly does not think that there was the slightest need to avoid them, or desire that his sons, in their spring-time, should be any wiser than their sire. John Halifax is another type of young man—such a type as one may find among the saints whom young ladies of High Church tendencies are fond of painting and of contemplating. But ordinary

life benefits little from the example of John Halifax. It is of no use bidding us poor creatures of clay to be like the illuminated saints, with dovelike eyes always looking piety, and gentle hands folded in perpetual devotion. That is the clever young lady's type of what masculine humanity ought to be; and a very admirable type it would be, well deserving of strenuous imitation, if men could by any process be so re-moulded as to have the souls and impulses of good young women instead of their own more rugged and passionate natures. Then there is the Arthur Pendennis type—the most elaborate, faithful, perfect picture known to our day, inspired by the very light of genius itself, the whole soul, spirit, and character of the English young man of Victoria's reign put into the form of a novelist's hero. But Pendennis's author declined to approach the wild oats question; frankly acknowledged, in so many words, that he had duly considered the matter, and preferred to omit it altogether, believing that the age had grown too pickled to bear an honest argument of it, and refusing to set it out in any pretty and plausible way for the use of boarding-schools and genteel society. The world, it seems to me, lost something thereby. No man of our time could have touched this pregnant question so delicately, yet so effectively, as Thackeray could; for, with a perception of man's ordinary nature which nothing could elude, he had at once a gentle, pitying sense of human weakness, and a high and noble standard of human duty. Richard

Feverel does attempt frankly and boldly to approach the wild oats question ; but having borne the risk and odium of approaching it, he suddenly shrinks back from it again, and, on the whole, we do not feel that we have learned much more than Miss Muloch could have taught us—that all men, and all women, too, ought to be perfect, if they could only contrive to reach that blest condition. This much may be said in disparagement of the book, regarding it as a novel with a purpose ; but as a mere novel of character, it would not be easy to speak too highly of the talents which it indicates. Some of the men drawn by Mr. Meredith are sketched with a hand so light, and yet so firm, that a sense of their reality impresses itself imperceptibly, and yet indelibly, on the mind. The women, perhaps, are less happy, and the author often sacrifices to that odd freak of modern taste which requires perfect ignorance as well as innocence in womanhood. He has, for example, a heroine so ineffably unconscious of the world's ways, that in the absence of her husband she spends her evenings *tête-à-tête*, and in the twilight, with a renowned London profligate of fashion, and never once suspects that he devotes himself to her society with any other motive than a disinterested desire to improve her knowledge of history. Indeed Mr. Meredith's women are, upon the whole, much open to the objection so commonly urged in disparagement of Thackeray's female characters—they are pretty, loving, innocent,

and silly ; or they are clever, selfish, and bad. They know nothing at all ; have, in fact, a perfectly Eden-like and Fayaway kind of innocence, difficult, I should think, to be retained up to years of discretion in this modern world of ours ; or they know rather too much, and are a good deal too fond of hinting at their knowledge. Their innocence rather too much reminds one of the *fausse Agnès* style of thing, and leaves the suspicious mind in a sort of doubt whether it is dealing with hypocritical affectation or with downright idiocy.

Mr. Meredith's habit is to seize one or two central figures, and to lavish upon the development of their natures the fulness of his artistic power ; all other forms and objects are merely thrown in as accessories, as furniture, as a mere background. Carelessness, haste, frequent vagueness, sudden bursts of caricature, are naturally the common phenomena of this artistic condition. In one of his novels, the concluding portion of which has only very lately been published, that which we may call the psychical interest is even more engrossingly developed than in *Richard Feverel*. *Emilia in London* is the unfolding of one human nature, the examination of one human heart. It is not an amusing, one can hardly even call it an agreeable story. There is something melancholy and occasionally harsh about its prevailing tone. Though it closes hopefully, its general effect is rather disheartening. Yet *Emilia in London* is in its general structure

perhaps an improvement on *Richard Feverel*. It is more of a novel and less of a philosophic essay. The style has fewer eccentricities in it, and there are indeed scarcely any of the fits and starts which disturb the reader of *Richard Feverel*. Its supreme merit consists in the fact that it has added to fiction one thoroughly original and perfectly natural human character. The story is simple in its outline. A girl, the daughter of an Italian living in London, is blessed with a wonderful voice and a passionate love for music. Italy and music are the organic passions of her existence ; but there grows up over these a new and still more consuming passion. She falls in love with a young cavalry-officer—a man not without brains and not without heart, but still much below her in truthfulness and depth of nature. He is divided between her and the world ; and at last she sees that the heart she seeks is not in him, and she has strength to put him away. Emilia is stricken down, but not wholly crushed. She has received a fearful wound, but not a mortal blow. She suffers cruelly, but she survives. This is in few words the argument of the story. Emilia's own character is the life and the beauty of it. She is genius without culture ; goodness without rule ; love without worldly restraint. Her passion for music, for Italy, and for Wilfrid, is blended with consummate skill. I remember no character in modern literature that so faithfully pictures the nature which is filled with a genius for music. Not even Consuelo,

in George Sand's novel, is so perfect an impersonation. The musical and the poetic are not represented in life by the same sort of human nature; but in books there is hardly any distinction ever drawn. The novelist commonly acts as if there were but one kind of artist nature, and as if the sole difference between painter, poet, and musician were contained in the different modes wherein the genius of each expresses itself. In life every one must be to some degree conscious how entirely unreal is this assumption. The most gifted musician often disappoints in intellectual companionship all but musicians. Intellect, and strangely enough the more poetic phase of intellect, seems often wanting in the singer whose whole soul is filled with music. Mr. Meredith has expressed his sense of this peculiarity in the admirably drawn character of Emilia. In everything, save that which regards song alone, her intellectual nature is commonplace and prosaic. Passion lifts her to heights which are in themselves essentially poetic and dramatic; and a pure, truthful simplicity keeps her always above the vulgarities of existence. That which would vulgarize others is dignified by her; but still she has nothing whatever in her honest childlike heart which reminds one of the Sappho or the Corinna; or even of the stage singer whom ordinary romancists have sometimes painted. There is nothing ideal about her, and she walks the earth with the tread of a mere woman. After the somewhat too theatrically arranged

incident which introduces her to the reader, we never again quit the beaten highway of modern prosaic life. In her moments of exaltation and her deep sufferings, her artist's passion, and her fervent woman's love, this singular, simple child of genius is affined by nature to the plainest and least romantic creature who ever cooked a husband's dinner. If there seems anything strange and fantastic in the character of Emilia, it is only because simple reality seems so often strange and fantastic when boldly introduced to supplant some long-established conventionality of fiction.

The character of Emilia is to me the first satisfactory evidence that Mr. Meredith really has in him some of the essential qualities of a great novelist. His works, as a whole, reveal undoubtedly the operations of a mind endowed with great and genuine power; of a quick, sensitive, feeling nature; of a rich and sometimes a prodigal fancy; of an intellect highly cultured, and matured by much observation. Still the books are hardly to be called successful in themselves. They exhibit a combination of faculties entirely above the ordinary range, they are distinguished by a freedom from the commonplace rare indeed in our days; and they have the power to set the reader thinking more often and more deeply than even the productions of greater intellects can always do. But the intellectual man predominates in them; and therefore they are not great works of fiction. The fusing heat of emotion which melts the substances of

a novel into one harmonious and fluent whole is wanting. The glow of absolute genius is never felt. The moment of projection never arrives ; the several substances never combine into the golden mass ; they remain cold, solid, and individual to the last. The reader is never carried away by the story ; he never loses sight of the narrator ; he never for a moment feels as if he were moving among the people of the novel, sharing their trials and their joys. Mr. Meredith falls into the common error of intellectual men who go about to construct a story upon purely intellectual principles. It is not enough to draw men and women with vigorous and lifelike touches. Mr. Meredith has done this in many instances with entire success. Emilia is a character wholly new to literature, and painted with consummate skill. Adrian, the Wise Youth of *Richard Feverel*, is such a picture as Bulwer in his brightest days might have been proud to own. It is not enough to have a keen observance of the shades of human feeling ; it is not enough to write eloquently, epigrammatically, and pathetically ; to have a racy faculty of humour ; even to have deep feeling and the capacity to express it in words and scenes. All these faculties, or most of them, are essential to the entire success of a novelist. But besides all these, there is something else needed. These are the ingredients ; but there must likewise be the capacity to combine and fuse them into one harmonious whole. There must be in fact the story-teller's

essential faculty—the capacity to tell a story. Whatever the gifts a man lavishes over his work, the first thing we must demand of him, if he is to be a novelist, is the power of holding firmly the attention and interest of his readers. Whether he writes for a purpose or without it, this faculty is equally essential. It may not be the highest quality, but it is the most indispensable. Whatever poetic inspiration a man may have, it is obvious that if he has no ear for rhythm or music he cannot be a poet. So of the novelist, he must be a story-teller first of all. Now Mr. Meredith has not as yet developed in himself the faculty of the story-teller. It is quite possible that he may yet prove it to be among his gifts, but his novels thus far do not sufficiently display it. Men of faculties far inferior to him have this gift to a degree incomparably higher. Some men have it, and having scarcely anything else, take a high place and exercise a wide influence by virtue of that faculty alone. The best story-teller our age has seen is a man to whom the phrase “inspired idiot” would seem very fairly to apply—I mean the inexhaustible author of *The Count of Monte Christo*. In our own literature Mr. Wilkie Collins is undoubtedly an excellent story-teller. He is not to be compared for a moment with Mr. Meredith in intellect, and fancy, and true perception of human feeling; but he is a good story-teller, and his books are read everywhere, while Mr. Meredith’s novels only extort the half-reluctant admiration of

some rare groups of intellectual readers. I think one reason is that Mr. Meredith always seems to write with a purpose. He is always apparently meditating on some phase of human life, some tendency of human nature, some melancholy confusion or mis-direction of human effort; and his whole soul is not in the work itself, but in something behind it, and of which it only faintly shadows out the reality and the meaning. He is too much of a thinking man; he needs the spirit which abandons itself wholly to the work, becomes lost in it, and has for the time no *arrière-pensée*, indeed no individual existence apart from it. The critical faculty is too strong in him, and therefore, even when he begins to grow earnest, he forthwith sets about to analyse this very earnestness, and it naturally vanishes in the effort. "I have never thought about thinking," says Goethe. Mr. Meredith seems almost always to think about thinking. He is like one who, half waking in the morning out of some vivid and fascinating dream, endeavours, instead of allowing the beautiful images still to float perceptible but unquestioned across his sensations, to seize them distinctly, to master their meaning, to individualize their outlines, and then finds them fading away, to be followed only by cold, grey reality. If one will be a dreamer, let him abandon himself to his dreams. In the land of fiction, feeling and fancy must guide; intellect must be content to follow. Mr. Meredith does not want the feeling or the fancy, he only gives

them the wrong place in his combinations. He must endeavour to keep the critic and the philosopher a little more in the background, and let the poet or the story-teller take the leading part. It was Virgil and not Aristotle who conducted Dante to the places where he saw the marvellous sights, and found the materials for the wonderful story. Mr. Meredith has much of a poet's nature, and only needs the courage to trust it more fully. Among his poetic qualities is one peculiarly rare in our day ; so rare, indeed, that most of our writers seem to have lost it altogether—that which appreciates and idealizes as woman's highest charm, her womanhood. He can therefore describe the growth of young and passionate love as few in our day can or will do. The lover of our English romance to-day is a creature without sex. The hero adores the heroine because of her virtues, or her gifts, or her modesty, or her truth, or her physical beauty ; but the element of her womanhood is almost entirely eliminated from his sensations. Either humanity is supposed to have lost the sentiment, or it is ashamed of it. The late Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of the very few authors of our time who endeavoured to restore the love of woman to its old, poetic, human, sensuous, yet unselfish nature. Mr. Meredith has striven in the same direction, and the very effort in itself proves a mind which is capable of perceiving and expressing some of the realities which are most truly poetic, and of rendering to them their

reality and their idealism at once. Some of the early love-scenes in *Richard Feverel* are themselves sufficient to justify the most serious regret that one endowed with so much of the poet's sympathies and the romancist's vivid power, should too often be induced to sink the story-teller in the critic, the poet in the social philosopher.

The greatest social difficulty in the England of to-day is not that which is created by the relations between wealth and poverty. These, however painful still, are hardly any longer perplexed. They seem at least to be brought as directly in the way towards a gradual adjustment as human enlightenment and benevolence can bring them for the present. The object cannot be attained by any rapid process ; but we seem to be in the right way for a gradual approach towards it. A much more complicated difficulty is found in the relations between man and woman. If we are to believe the teachings and the revelations of newspapers, sermons, pamphlets, speeches, and stories, the social life of England to-day shows scarcely any improvement in this direction. The principal difference between ourselves and our ancestors is, that they took society as they found it, and never troubled themselves on the subject ; while we are self-conscious and perplexed. We see the difficulties and dangers, but we do not see the way out of them. The institution of marriage might almost seem to be, as was said on a remarkable occasion of constitutional govern-

ment, just now upon its trial. What English people used to think Madame George Sand very wicked years ago for saying, newspapers, and books, and even sermons, not uncommonly say now. It is discovered that throughout English social life immorality is a much more general institution than successful and satisfactory marriage. Leading newspapers have admitted grave and earnest argument to prove that the mistress is a far cheaper, more convenient, and agreeable companion than the wife. Fashionable young ladies in London are reputed to make no secret that they dress and get themselves generally up after the pattern of certain more successful sisters, whom once it was accounted a vice to know. Anonyma's portrait hangs in almost every photographer's window. Anonyma's biography is bought by thousands, and elaborately reviewed in fashionable weekly journals. Anonyma is to a certain extent the pet of the age, and is openly pleaded for by many practical moralists as a present necessity to the convenience and harmony of the world. But as no one has the courage to say that he thinks Anonyma is in herself a desirable institution, and as even her warmest admirers only profess to stand up for her as a temporary arrangement, a passing convenience, a sort of living bridge over which humanity is to cross from absolute vice into final and roseate virtue, it is but natural that we should all incline much to the consideration how the transit may be most rapidly and easily effected, and how Anonyma

may be most promptly got rid of, and having served her ignoble but convenient purpose, may be pushed from her place and allowed to drop once for all into the depths of the gulf which lies between the two conditions.

Now to this theme, or at least to some topic bearing on and connected with it, some novelists who write with a purpose are now and then boldly addressing themselves. I readily admit its great importance, and quite as readily acknowledge the utter folly of ignoring it. That sense of propriety which is satisfied by simply pretending that we do not see and hear things which no human precaution can shut out from our eyes and ears, is worthy of nothing but contempt. The innocence which is ignorance becomes impossible after a certain age, and if it were not impossible it would be merely despicable. When Mrs. Norton published her *Lost and Saved* she was criticised rather sharply because of the peculiar nature of her subject. She was reminded by one reviewer that such reading was not good for the young. Her defence of herself was, I think, unassailable. It might, indeed, have been summed up in a sentence. The book was not intended to be read by the young. Its peculiar value was to be found in the fact that it was not meant to be reading for the young. It was meant to teach something which cannot be taught by *Goody Two Shoes*. It was designed to expose certain social dangers which are not described

in the *Seven Champions of Christendom*. To condemn such a book out of hand because it was not pretty reading for school-girls, is like condemning Mill's *Political Economy* because it cannot be converted into nursery rhymes. This much is fairly to be said for the principle of Mrs. Norton's novel. Strangely enough, however, the authoress was assailed for her purpose, which deserved all praise ; and generally praised for the manner in which she accomplished the purpose, wherein she merited but very doubtful panegyric. *Lost and Saved* is a decidedly clever book—I was about to add “for a woman,” but remembering what some women have done in our day, I feel that the qualification would be entirely out of place. It is full of vivacious writing ; it has two or three characters admirably drawn ; it is enriched with the most varied illustrations and experiences drawn from social life, and it has some passages which occasionally rise almost to the simple dignity of the pathetic. But although clever, it has scarcely any originality ; it exhibits a commonplace cleverness from beginning to end. There is no real thought in it, but only a clever imitation of thought. It differs from any ordinary young lady's story only inasmuch as the authoress has had a real and lengthened experience of the fashionable life she describes, and has the talent to turn her knowledge to effective and showy account. But the story is the old, old story over again. A beautiful young girl is ensnared by a handsome, selfish

young aristocrat : she is deceived by a pretended marriage, and finally abandoned with her child. Then she suffers all the neglect, misconstruction, and harshness of a cold and cruel world, and is reduced to terrible exigencies—selling her drawings, offering herself as a model, and the like ; until at last the time comes for bringing the tale to a genial close, and she is saved by the love of a charming Italian nobleman, who marries her, and makes her wealthy and happy. There is a great deal of fashionable selfishness touched off vigorously enough in the novel ; and there are some smiling, delightful, and very wicked ladies of Belgravia ; and there is a tolerably vigorous use of strong poison here and there, when an inconvenient personage has to be killed-off. But while all these incidents are certainly so skilfully put together as to make an entertaining and sometimes even a brilliant story, one cannot help wondering now and then what new light on life the authoress supposed herself to be shedding, what original and valuable moral lesson she believed herself to be expounding ? For there is scarcely a page of the book which does not indicate to us that the writer feels conscious of a high purpose. What is it ? That it is wrong to seduce young women by means of a pretended marriage all the world, including even the criminals themselves, will readily admit. That the man who so deceives poor Beatrice in the novel was justly punished when he swallowed a dose of poison intended for

somebody else and expired in agonies, we shall all be quite ready to concede. That fashionable ladies do sometimes deceive their husbands, correspond with their lovers by cipher in the *Times*, and make assignations through the medium of "that political pretence, the Ladies' Gallery in the House of Commons;" all this is possible enough. And all this—as a mere illustration of certain lives, and characters, and ways—may be read with interest. But the book is evidently designed to expound some moral, and I fail to understand what the moral is. The authoress is sometimes very hard upon that impersonal scapegoat of individual wrong-doing—Society. She seems to think that society treated Beatrice Brooke very cruelly, and that society somehow was responsible for the greater part of her misfortunes. Now, I have long been of opinion that romance has rather overdone the complaints against society. At least, it seems futile to pour out sentimental complaints, if no one will or can help society to mend its ways, or even suggest how an approach towards amendment may be essayed. Was society to be blamed because it declined to receive into its house, as governess for its children or companion for its wife, a young unmarried lady with a baby? For the complaint against society in *Lost and Saved* narrows itself to this somewhat practical and homely issue. Or was society much to blame because it hesitated to believe the marvellous story about the marriage which was not a marriage after

all? As a mere matter of fact, society was right in this case, and Beatrice Brooke was wrong: for society refused to believe her married, and the event proved that she was not married. A stern attorney declines to give Miss Brooke a "character" that she may become a governess or companion, and the authoress seems to think this was very cruel of the attorney; but was it not a simple act of honesty and truth? Supposing even that the attorney did not himself condemn Beatrice, would he have had any right to give her a character which omitted all notice of her "misfortune"? True, the attorney's own wife was not a spotless personage, and besides a little taste for intrigue had a taste for poisoning as well; but the attorney was not aware of these proclivities: and even if he had been, he was not about to send his wife out as governess or companion. True, several fashionable ladies in the book are far worse than Beatrice, who, poor girl! is indeed innocent of all but amazing simplicity; but society does not and cannot stop to scrutinize everybody's private life. If it finds a palpable offender in its way, it pronounces condemnation, harshly and hastily, no doubt, in too many cases; but I do not see how the justice or injustice of the particular sentence is affected by the fact that there may be other offenders just as bad, whom society has not taken the trouble to find out. The authoress of *Lost and Saved* does not take up George Sand's early views of life, and argue boldly that love is all—marriage

and proprieties nothing. Right or wrong, that view of the question would be intelligible. Society and its code might justly be assailed from this standpoint. Society does at present deliberately, theoretically, and practically regard the one error of a too loving and perhaps unselfish woman as a crime infinitely greater than a whole life passed in selfishness and meanness, in the seeking of petty, ignoble objects, in the ignoring of all the better aims of human existence, in a condition which is but legalized prostitution. An author who chooses boldly to assail society on that ground has a fair, distinct, and noble cause of quarrel. All that can be said against his pleadings is that in the present condition of English social ethics, he merely wastes his time and calls aloud to solitude. But the authoress of *Lost and Saved* by no means accepts that issue. Her complaint against society seems to be that society believed a young woman guilty of sin who really was not guilty; while society did not discover or overlooked the errors of some who were genuine sinners. I confess that I think there is a good deal to be said for society in this quarrel, and that what is fairly to be urged against it is hardly worth the saying. Nor do I think very highly of the value of that moral tendency which runs through so many modern books, and which would almost entirely relieve of responsibility the tangible individual, in order to shift the burden to the impalpable shoulders of the abstraction, Society. It is quite open to ques-

tion whether much more evil than good is not done by the stern and implacable sentence with which society visits certain offences in women. It can hardly insure any really good purpose to create a pariah class from which there is to be no redemption. Of course, the evil effect is much aggravated if the sentence is necessarily uncertain and capricious; if the scarlet letter be affixed to the bosom of the poor victim of an error, while half a dozen dexterous and callous offenders escape unbranded. But while the punishment may be far too severe, we yet need not diminish the individual responsibility. We ought not to teach women that they are mere puppets of man's passion, soulless creatures for whom, as for children, an absence of all individual responsibility may be claimed. It is a great pity that novelists in general delight to make their heroines such hopeless idiots, and demand for them only the kind of reverence which the Oriental acknowledges towards idiocy. The author of the novel entitled *Recommended to Mercy* has had the courage to strike out something of a new path. This book (for which an apologetic preface pleads that it is a "not wholly imaginary, but somewhat hastily written tale") has the sense not to lay upon society's shoulders any of the original sin of his heroine's fall. The Helen of this novel frankly despises marriage, and is, like Dryden's Antony, all for love. She braves society, lives with the man she loves, is abandoned by him, and redeems her

error of principle or judgment by a life devoted to active and unwearying benevolence. The book does not possess any sustained merit. It opens with a thrilling scene which at first leads the reader to believe that he has met with a new intellect of fresh and uncommon power; but the little burst of inspiration soon collapses and is gone, and the story degenerates into an ordinary tale of complicated mystery and extravagant sensation. Its general purport, however, seems to be a healthful insistence that a life shall be judged in its whole, and not by this or that chapter cut and printed in letters of gold, or burned by the hands of the common hangman. It introduces us to a good many scenes whereon propriety must look astounded and shocked, and where the life of the *demi-monde*, naked and not ashamed, confronts us at almost every turn. Artistically there is not much to be said for the book. It has chiefly attracted my attention because in it at least is one woman for whose fall beneath society's surface of smooth propriety none of the conventional excuses of romance is pityingly urged. The heroine sees and understands her risk, accepts it, suffers for her venture, and pays the penalty with a brave heart. The error was committed by herself, and her fate is redeemed by herself. I own to a much greater sympathy with this description of heroine, than with the forlorn creatures of the ordinary British novel, who are always crying "I didn't mean to do it" when the evil is done,

and for whose individual errors the pitying author makes society a whipping-boy. If any real good can come of treating such social questions through the medium of fiction, the good must be attained rather by endeavouring to increase than to lessen the sense of individual responsibility. The best justification for the adoption of such topics as the groundwork of novels destined for general reading assuredly is that women may perhaps be thus redeemed from the possibility of remaining in that imbecile and ignorant condition which the romancist commonly regards as innocence, and which woman is so generally encouraged to cherish as her special virtue, even by those who are most earnest in describing it as the principal cause of her ruin.

Are, then, such topics suited for fiction? Are novels with a purpose likely ever to prove successful works of art? "That," the critic may fairly say to the author, in the words of Hamlet, "you must teach me." It is yet for some man or woman of great genius to solve the problem. Experience thus far is discouraging. Such novels as I have just glanced over do not warrant one in saying that the question is yet any nearer to a satisfactory solution than it was in the last generation of romance. No doubt efforts will always be made, and rightly, towards this end. Any real success thus obtained ought to be a triumph well worthy of a life's struggle. Yet nothing can be more certain than the fact that the greatest novelists have not made any such effort, or having made it, had to confess them-

selves defeated. I do not recollect even one great novel with a purpose. Cervantes certainly did not produce *Don Quixote* in order to smile Spain's chivalry away. Le Sage had no great moral object in view while developing the life and character of *Gil Blas*. Fielding wrote with no deliberate purpose, and *Tom Jones* is immortal. Smollett had no grand social reform in his mind when he plunged into the adventures of *Peregrine Pickle*; and the world will always read of Peregrine, and Trunnion, and Pipes. Richardson, on the other hand, had a great moral purpose, and where is poor Pamela now, and who cares about her queer virtue—her “anatomical chastity,” as Heine would have called it—which found such an appropriate coronal in the hardly-won marriage ring? *Robinson Crusoe* is not a book with a moral purpose; neither is *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Scott is a splendid story-teller, but his novels are not tracts. The didactic portions of *Wilhelm Meister* are insufferably tedious. Dickens has always failed where he has set out to write a book expressly for some specially philanthropic object; and the great fault which a certain class of practical persons find with Thackeray, is that he had no purpose whatever, and that his books illustrate no moral. The greatest book with a purpose produced for many years is Victor Hugo's *Misérables*; and of that I have tried to show that the story was nearly crushed by the weight of the moral, while the moral went astray because it had to entrust itself to the

guidance of the story. In the books which I have just been reviewing, all the old difficulties and objections revive. It is very hard indeed to serve two masters ; it is especially hard to serve them both at once.

I have selected these books as examples of the novel with a purpose, partly because of one common peculiarity which may in many eyes seem a serious objection. It is worthy of notice, because it raises a somewhat important question relating to the morale of the novelist's art. Each of these books was a practical protest, more or less direct and bold, against the tacit arrangement by which decent fiction in our day is expected to ignore all the perplexities, dangers, and sufferings springing from the relations between man and woman. Now I can see no reason whatever why the novelist should be expected to shrink from taking into account one of the greatest sources of human trial, difficulty, and fall. I am not speaking now of novels which obviously delight in the piquancy of seductions and adulteries for the sake of their piquancy and prurieney. Such novelists of course we have, and, as everybody knows, they are generally women. But I do not regard the rubbish of some of our fast young authors in petticoats as literature at all. It will be dead and gone the day after to-morrow, leaving no influence whatever behind it ; and perhaps we should never have been vexed by its appearance among us at all, but that it was a sort of inevitable reaction against the rigorous prudery of orthodox and established writers. I am

speaking now of books which really deserve to be ranked as literature, and in which human passions are treated in the spirit of a teacher and an artist. I sympathize with any author of this class who feels impelled to infuse more reality into his work than is necessary to make a pretty prose idyl or humorous caricature. There is no need to allow into our literature any taint of the prevailing vice of the French novel and the French drama. Nine out of every ten French novels of to-day, and nearly all French dramas, turn upon what is called in polite English prose illicit love. Life, indeed, as depicted by the French novelist, is occupied in an unceasing pursuit of our humble neighbour's daughter or our wealthy neighbour's wife. Now it would be deplorable indeed to see this style of art imported into English fiction. If there were no other reason for objecting to it, it would be enough to say that it presents an entirely false view even of French social life. It would be as absurd to judge of the domestic life of France by the pictures which Feydeau, and Dumas fils, and Edmond About, and the author of *Madame Bovary*, and dramatists of the Sardou school, have drawn, as it would be to conclude that every English family circle must include at least one murderer or murderess, and one maniac, because Wilkie Collins and Miss Braddon have found it convenient thus to represent the social existence of English people. Besides, the whole tone and temper of French fiction at present is corrupt and degrading. There is an absence of earnestness and of heart about

it which in itself is an evil. Vice is either painted in alluring, fascinating, and sensuous colours, or it is touched off with a dash of gay and pleasant cynicism as something which sensible men and women do not think it worth their while to avoid, or to lament, or to condemn. But between this style and that of orthodox English authors, there surely might be a middle place conveniently and effectively found. The world of some of our best British novelists of the present day is really no more like the real world which we all see around us, than the pastoral life of the opera is like the actual condition of the Swiss mountain peasantry. The author of *Pendennis* complained that since the days of *Tom Jones* no great English novelist had ventured to draw a faithful picture of an ordinary young man. The complaint had sufficient justification. In Dickens's books, for instance, if a man is not simply wicked he is simply good. The heroes, and still more the heroines, walk through the world absolutely without passion of any kind that leads to temptation. Common-place young men, if they are only meant to be the heroes of the stories, pass through the worst dangers of life as unscathed as a virgin martyr of old over her red-hot ploughshares. Nay, the most extraordinary part of the matter is, that we are not even allowed to acknowledge the existence of the ploughshares, although we know well enough, every one of us, that there they are, red and glowing, and that even very good fellows who turn out decent members of society have not escaped without burnt skin from the

contact. The higher world of fiction is still, for the most part, a nursery and bread-and-butter world. Terrible dangers no doubt are described as therein to be met ; dragons, and ogres, and giants, and strangely wicked people, waiting to devour the good little boys and girls. But the familiar, homely, real, seductive dangers of grown-up human life are not to be talked of there. The heroine of the respectable modern novel seems always as if she still ought to wear short clothes and trousers with frills round them. Even the downright bad people in most novels are not bad as in the ordinary world. They are so hopelessly bad that we feel no claim of kindred with them at all. Their wrong-doing affects us not in the least ; it carries no more warning or moral to ordinary living human beings than would a diatribe against the cruelty of a tiger or the unbridled excesses of a shark. The great source of human temptation, and discord, and unhappiness affects the romance people not in the least. The hero has but one desire in his life—to marry the heroine ; and as he never felt any movement of passion before his eyes fell upon her, so having married her, all human weakness, all anger, envy, jealousy, selfishness, impatience, are purged thoroughly out of him, and he and his wife are rapt away in a roseate cloud from the ken of common-place mortality. The women of course have no passions at all. Even the wicked women—the harsh stepmothers, and jealous sisters, and heartless coquettes—have no pulse whatever in their frames which could throb for one moment to an improper emotion. When

a girl in a high-class English novel is seduced, it is always an example of the old conventional tale of the tempter and his hapless, guileless, too confiding victim. The victim never, except in some instances of rare audacity on the part of the novelist, conduces in the slightest towards her own wrong. She is passionless, guiltless, only to be wept over. Even Charles Dickens's Nancy, who, one would think, must have sounded the lowest depths, talks delightful sentiment, and melts away into refreshing Sunday-school piety and pathos. I scarcely remember in a modern English novel of note any single instance, except that of Hetty in *Adam Bede*, where a seduced girl is acknowledged to have advanced one willing step, and with her eyes even half open, towards the ruin which awaited her. Now I feel convinced that the conventional mode of dealing with such subjects, if it has any effect whatever, has an influence for evil. There is no good end attained by trying to persuade ourselves that women are all incorporeal, angelic, colourless, passionless, helpless creatures, who are never to suspect anything, never to doubt any one, who regard the whole end and passion of human life as ethereal Platonic love, and orderly, parent-sanctioned wedlock. Women have especial need, as the world goes, to be shrewd, self-reliant, and strong; and we do all we can in our literature to render them helpless, imbecile, and idiotic. When Charlotte Brontë endeavoured to do otherwise, we can all recollect that a prudish scream was raised against her, and genteel virtue affected to

be horrified with the authoress who drew women and girls endowed with human passion. Something of the same kind has been said against the authoress of *Adam Bede*; and there was a time when a discreet Englishwoman would have blushed to acknowledge acquaintance even with a chapter of George Sand. I am so thoroughly impressed with the conviction that art and morals alike suffer by the prudish conventionalities of the respectable British style, that I feel inclined to welcome rebellion against it merely because it is rebellion. A Parisian critic, a year or two since, when noticing some objections urged against the numerous undraped Graces, and Bacchantes, and nymphs, and Ledas in the season's Exhibition, drily remarked that so long as vast skirts and hoops endured, it was a relief to get a glimpse of the true outlines of womanhood under any circumstances. I own to something of a kindred feeling in regard to our high-class English fiction. While it is coldly, stiffly, prudishly agreed to paint for us as a rule only such life as might be lectured on in a young ladies' boarding-school, one feels thankful to the novelist who has the courage to approach some of the great problems of existence, and to show us human creatures as we know them around us, tried by the old passions and quivering with the old pains.

THE END.











